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MIRACLES

THE CREDENTIALS OF THE CHRIST

BACHE

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MIRACLES

THE CREDENTIALS OF THE CHRIST:

FIVE LECTURES,

DELIVERED IN

THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH,

BIRMINGHAM,

ON SUNDAY MORNINGS IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, 1863;

BY SAMUEL BACHE,

MINISTER OF THE CONGREGATION.

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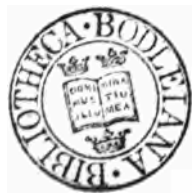
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TO THE

CONGREGATION FORMERLY ASSEMBLING

IN THE NEW MEETING-HOUSE,

AND NOW IN THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH,

BIRMINGHAM,

THIS ENDEAVOUR TO UPHOLD THE TRUTH,

TO THE MAINTENANCE OF WHICH

THAT CHURCH HAS BEEN BY ITS DESIGNATION

SPECIALLY DEDICATED,

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY THEIR PASTOR

FOR THE LAST THIRTY YEARS

IN THE MINISTRY OF

THE GOSPEL.

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PREFACE.

THE following Lectures have been written from the

The reader is requested to correct the following Errata :—

Page 2 line 9 *For* leading *read* leading.
— 5 — 4 *from the bottom, For* " supernatural," *read* " supernatural."
— 39 — 16 *For* Chistianity *read* Christianity.
— 39 — 18 *For* distincly *read* distinctly.
— 81 — 8 *Insert — after* (p. 44.)

himself the entire course of the argument. I hope that by this condensation, the argument itself will be presented with greater clearness and power.

I am chiefly induced to publish these Lectures by the very same considerations which induced me to deliver them: these considerations being that in the formation of an intelligent and operative religious faith, every individual has to acquire for himself the knowledge and the conviction which go to constitute

it:—that the wonderfully rapid progress and development of our material civilization during the present century has unquestionably *tended* to divert the thoughts and inclinations of men from the inquiries necessary to this acquisition: and that, in particular, the characteristic *sensationalism* of the age in which we now live requires the corrective influence of serious thought and inquiry in connection with the well-authenticated records of the past, in order to preserve among our nation in general, and to implant and cherish among the rising race in particular, the conviction that "there is verily a God who judgeth "in the earth, and verily such a reward for the "righteous" as cannot be comprised within any measure of mere worldly attainment or happiness, but is the divinely appointed fruit of righteousness itself; the "fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting "life."

Let me thankfully record the gratification which I have received in connection with these Lectures, not merely from the request for their publication by some of those who heard them, but also from the thoughtful and ingenuous inquiries and observations of some of my younger friends during the delivery of them. Such inquiries or observations I would still earnestly invite from them: since whatever be the impression which they may have already received, I cannot but hope

that they will review the argument which these Lectures unfold, and may be thus brought to discern the consistency and conclusiveness of the argument itself, and the high practical value of the truth which it is designed to establish.

In preparing these Lectures, I have done little more than arrange, in the order of what seems to me a strictly logical demonstration, the statements and arguments of some of the most enlightened and intelligent writers of an age in which men were accustomed to apply to such inquiries the same cautious and discriminating judgment as is now too exclusively applied to secular science and its objects. In the consideration of abstract spiritual truth, the practice at the present day very widely prevails of confounding indefiniteness with comprehension, simply because the culture of mere sensationalism in this connection is unfavourable to clear and accurate thought. Thus the term *inspiration*, which, in all theological inquiry, has been for ages appropriate to the immediate communication of divine truth to special divine messengers, is now recklessly used as meaning no more than the insight of genius or the consciousness of ordinary intelligence: and in like manner all the distinctive significance of the phrase *divine revelation* is utterly destroyed by the application of it to any and every one of the countless manifestations of the

power and providence of God; while even attesting *miracle* is treated as nothing more than an ordinary wonder.

In preparing these Lectures, I have very painfully felt the contrast which is exhibited by a very large part, (and that the most popular,) of our current religious literature, when placed by the side of those clear and discriminating writings of Lardner, Paley, Channing, and others, from which I have made copious extracts. The aim of much of our current religious literature seems to be to obliterate those distinctions which it is the very purpose of the rational use of language to maintain: and if, by the publication of these Lectures, I shall induce any who read them to go back to the works of these older writers, and especially to read and thoughtfully digest the admirable Dudleian Lecture of Channing, and his other Lecture on the Evidences of Christianity, from which I have given several extracts, I am satisfied that their intellectual benefit will be at least commensurate with their spiritual; on the very principle which Channing himself so clearly and eloquently maintains in one of the quotations which I have made, that "the head and the heart are not more vitally connected than thought and virtue."

In conclusion let me record the avowal with which (if my memory do not mislead me) I prefaced the

delivery of the Lectures themselves: to the effect, namely, that recognising the unavoidable limitations and imperfections of our common humanity, I am fully conscious of my own liability to error, and am confident that some alloy of actual error must be mixed up with whatever I embrace as truth: and that, therefore, a rational and just diffidence of myself must combine with an equally rational and just respect for the independent responsibility of others, to make me deliberately and earnestly desire that my statements and arguments should have no further weight with my hearers or readers than as they approve themselves, on careful examination and reflection, to their own understandings and consciences. Sincerely and heartily do I desire to make my own the generous sentiment of the Apostle, and apply it equally to conscientious and earnest inquirers after truth as well without as within the Christian Church; "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith" (your own, not ours) "ye stand." (II. Cor. 1. 24.)

In this spirit of reverence for what I deem important truth myself and of reverence also for the individual liberty of others, and with an earnest desire to commend what I deem truth to the conscience of every one of my readers as in the sight of God, and especially to every one of those to whom it

is my duty and privilege to minister in holy things, I trust that I may without presumption implore the blessing of God on my humble but earnest endeavour to vindicate and illustrate His paternal providence and will as I believe them to have been specially made known in the doctrines and life of Christ Jesus our Lord: through whom to Him, the infinite and sole Author and Giver of all good, would I desire to unite with all my fellow Christians in ascribing glory and praise now and evermore.

S. B.

Edgbaston, June, 1863.

LECTURE I.

MIRACLES DEFINED.

ACTS II. 22. "JESUS OF NAZARETH, PROVED UNTO YOU TO BE A MAN FROM GOD, BY MIRACLES AND WONDERS AND SIGNS WHICH GOD DID BY HIM IN THE MIDST OF YOU, AS YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW."

THESE words form part of the address of the Apostle Peter to his countrymen in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when he rose up with the Eleven to vindicate them all from the imputation cast upon them in consequence of their beginning to exercise the gift of tongues which had just been conferred upon them in fulfilment of their Master's promise, and in further evidence of his divine mission and authority. They are a clear and explicit declaration of that divine mission and authority which Jesus claimed, and of the credentials by which his claim was established. As such, I take them as the text of every one of these lectures on Miracles; adopting, in preference to the rendering of our Authorized Version, the translation of the eminently learned and pious Gilbert Wakefield, as being much more faithful

to the original, and for that very reason, at the same time, much more appropriate to the subject of which I intend to treat; the very subject which the Apostle Peter had here specially in view.

"Miracles, wonders, signs;" a Hebrew accumulation of terms very nearly synonymous, suggested to St. Peter, no doubt, by his own natural earnestness, and employed as the result of that earnestness to express his leadlng idea more fully and forcibly. It will be useful, however, that we should note their specific differences. The word translated *miracles* has special reference to the *power* by which these works were wrought, and is the very word which is represented in our language by the term *dynamics*: the word translated *wonders* expresses the reverential *astonishment* and *awe*, "*fear and trembling*," with which this power was witnessed or experienced, as in the case of the woman who was instantaneously cured of an issue of blood, (Mark, v. 33): while the word translated *signs* expresses the purpose of these wonderful works to *mark out* the individual who wrought them as "a man from God."

The notice of these specific differences will have prepared us for the clearer consideration of our first inquiry on this subject:—

(1) What *is* a miracle? Putting together the foregoing statements we discover that a Miracle is an immediate and special manifestation of Divine power in attestation of a special Messenger from God and of his special Mission.

A Miracle is, therefore, *not* a mere wonder or prodigy. True it is that, in accordance simply with its etymology—*miraculum*, from *miror*, I wonder,—the word *Miracle* is frequently used in common

discourse to express what is merely wonderful, or extraordinary. A wonderful and unexpected deliverance from imminent danger is often called *miraculous;* any very striking or unusual manifestation of Divine power in the awful or glorious phenomena of nature is often characterized by the same designation: but in all such cases the word is employed in what is simply its etymological sense, and not in the sense in which it is applied to the "mighty works" of Jesus Christ our Lord. Much confusion of thought has frequently been caused in the discussion of this subject by the neglect of this very obvious and important distinction. The miracles of Jesus Christ were *not mere marvels or prodigies,* like the ox speaking in the forum, as recorded by Livy, or Balaam's ass speaking, as recorded in Numbers xxii. 28: and, therefore, were the marvels or prodigies of which we read in other histories, ancient or modern, ever so well authenticated, they would not, as mere marvels or prodigies, have any bearing upon the miracles recorded in the New Testament.

Neither, for the same reason, does any mere *novelty* in the exercise of creative power constitute a miracle in the Scriptural sense. The first creation of man upon this earth, for instance,—(whether immediately or by the process of gradual development as maintained by some modern philosophers makes no difference to this inquiry,)—however wonderful an exercise of divine power and wisdom, was no *miracle,* inasmuch as it was not the proof of any special divine mission: nor, universally, was the introduction of any new series of geological or other phenomena, in the Scriptural sense, *miraculous.* The discoveries of science, therefore, in connection with the material universe

have not, nor ever can have, any legitimate bearing on the miracles recorded in our gospels; because those miracles were not mere manifestations of divine power, but manifestations of divine power as the credentials of a special divine messenger and his mission. Hence it is obvious to remark that—

(2.) A miracle is necessarily an *exception* to the ordinary physical modes of the divine operation which we call the Laws of Nature: its essence consists in its being *exceptional*.

On this point I cannot do better than adopt and condense the very able and discriminating remarks which I have read in an admirable article in the *National Review* for October, 1861.

With reference to the statement just made, that the very essence of a miracle consists in its being *exceptional*, the Reviewer justly remarks that there have been writers who have maintained the very opposite view. They have regarded the "mighty works" of Christ as no less natural to his place in the scale of being, and no more wonderful, except to the observer at a lower point, than the brilliant marvels which a Faraday might display before an assembly of astonished savages; and were it even to prove within the resources of future science to repeat at will the very acts recorded in the gospels, their divine character and function would be in no way affected. This view, however, seems to me quite untenable. If miracles are merely the exercise of a higher art, the anticipation of a skill to be learned hereafter by those who marvel at it now, they manifest nothing but superior scientific knowledge, and such command of the methods of nature as might be attainable in a godless world. The proper treatment

of miracles in that case would be a close scrutiny of the scientific conditions of their performance until the rules were detected by which the worker of them gained his end; and the moment this was done, their characteristic impression as testimonies to a special divine messenger and his mission would be *lost*, and rationalism would have established its case. In proportion as the agent himself was of a truthful and earnest mind,—a Faraday, or such as a Faraday would revere,—he would be eager for this result, eager to explain and impart the method of his proceeding, and to take the seeming mystery away. He would never use his power as an instrument of persuasion and authority in matters moral and spiritual, with which it has no inner connection. Such a proceeding would be dishonest, directly opposed, therefore, to the principles and spirit of a divine teacher. In short, *a miracle by scientific process* is self-condemned; for the whole religious meaning of miracle consists in this—that it is an immediate creation of Will as distinguished from the mediate elaborations of method. Take away this meaning, and how can miracles startle and refresh the earth with the recovered sense of divine power? That they do this is due to their being accepted as direct products of lordly and originating Will as opposed to the procured results of obedient and sequacious intelligence.

Whether miracles are in accordance with or exceptions to "natural law," depends upon the range of definition given to the word "natural," and upon our separating it from the "supernatural." *Natural* means "agreeable to nature;" it may be the nature of God, or of the perceptible universe, or of man. With the last of these (man) the present question

has no concern, since man is confessedly not the controller of that law. To God, as all-comprehending, the miraculous and the ordinary are no doubt "natural" alike, determined into existence conformably with the supreme order of his mind, and the spontaneous rules of a Will which excludes confusion and caprice. In reference to God and his will, it is perfectly true, therefore, that miracles are instances, not violations, of "natural law:" to suppose the contrary would be to suppose that God wrought them on no rule or principle at all. But it is not usual, except in pantheistic speculation, to carry the word "Nature" up to this height; and not till we limit it to the physical universe, can we reasonably ask what is, and what is not, in conformity with "natural law;" that is with the method constituted for the given class of cases. There is no way of solving such a question except by comparing the phenomenon with the ascertained rule for its usual production, and seeing how far it is in accordance with that rule. By this test, a miracle is surely irreducible to natural law. Its very essence is to be exceptional to the events owning proper law; and whoever affirms it to fall under another law, which however he cannot find and name, does but whisper its supernatural character away by a gratuitous surmise. He may still, it is true, regard it as a *Divine act;* because he may look on all that happens in the orderly vicissitude of things, as the immediate product of God's living will, and may regard the "laws" of the world as only the rules, and its alleged "forces" as only the types, of his single power: but in thus abolishing the distinction between pretended Secondary Causes and the One Primary, he leaves unremoved the difference

between the usual and the exceptional mode of Divine activity. The former is what we mean by "natural law," the latter by "miracle." In the one, God proceeds in fidelity to a method laid down as a basis for human expectations; in the other, we conceive him to act for a special purpose, out of those moral affections which are the real background of all the order of the world, but which the custom of things is apt to hide from our dull eye. This *free* agency, straight out of the ultimate springs of the spirit, unhindered by pledged usage, seems to us to give the true conception of the "Supernatural." *Nature* is the sphere and system of God's self-prescribed methods of reliable evolution of phenomena; but above and beyond Nature, He is *Spirit*, including Nature indeed as part of that Spirit's expression; but instead of being all committed to Nature, transcending it on every side, and opening a life of communion with the spirits that can reflect himself. All is thus his agency; Nature his *fixed* will, Spirit his *free* will. To take Miracle from the latter and hand it over to the former, is to strip it of its special interest as an expression of character, while setting up for it an inferior claim which cannot possibly be substantiated. We know the law to which the act of walking on the sea would present an indisputable exception: we know of none which it would exemplify, and indulge an unauthorized fancy in supposing it.

Hence the Writer of this Article justly concludes that the decision of the question of Miracles rests, not with the metaphysician, but with the historical critic. "Signs and wonders," (says he,) however related to nature and to God, are not self-evidencing

things, but reported facts, whose intrinsic credibility, even at the strongest, is liable to be forfeited by testimonial defects. It is not when we sit at a vague distance, but when we go into the interior detail of Scripture, that the real elements of this inquiry present themselves. Who are our informants? What were their sources of knowledge? Do they agree? Are they free from distorting media of observation? Are they all of equal value, or must discrimination be exercised upon their mixed materials? Such are the questions on which this controversy hinges; and it is a good service to rid the field of those prejudgments against miracles which too often intercept the just impressions of the Sacred Writings.

Thus, then, stands the case as set forth in the foregoing admirable remarks, adopted, and as far as possible quoted from this review. Here on earth we are under *fixed* Will as our *normal* state. The reason is that in no other way would it be possible for us to acquaint ourselves with the physical agencies around us, or to employ those agencies, as our Creator has manifestly intended that we *should* employ them, for the accomplishment of our own intelligent plans with a view to our comfort, improvement, and enjoyment as inhabitants of the world in which we live. Were the *normal* certainty and immutability of the law of gravitation, for example, destroyed, no projects or works of human device with a view to outward and material benefit could be reasonably contemplated or begun, because the very foundation of all physical stability would be destroyed; and we might as well attempt to erect our houses on ground heaving and yawning with the throes of an earthquake, as to erect them on any ground deprived of this essential warrant

of its stability, and with materials themselves destitute of all reliable cohesion of particles. Accordingly this *fixed* Will never has been, never is, and perhaps never will be, generally or wholly subverted. Miracles did not *thus subvert* it; they only, in what were comparatively a very few instances and for a very important special purpose, *interrupted* it. During the entire ministry of Jesus Christ, the stability of this earth and of its several parts and elements, was *normally* inviolate. His miracles involved, comparatively, very few exceptional manifestations of Divine power, and these within a very limited area both of time and space. It is a gross misrepresentation of the actual miracles recorded in the gospels to represent them as introducing into the age or country in which they were wrought, any element of confusion or distrust in regard to the *normal* condition of the material world or of its inhabitants. The fact is the very reverse. Numerous and striking as were the miracles of Jesus, regarded in connection with his personal mission and ministry and its objects, they altogether sink into insignificance, both for their number and their grandeur and extent, when viewed in comparison with the countless and incessant and marvellous phenomena of nature around us with which our eyes are daily familiar, and on which, in consequence of this very familiarity, we are in danger of gazing without any religious thought. If this life were our *all*, it might be sufficient for us to see and investigate these wonders of the Almighty hand with a regard only to their physical qualities and relations. No interruption of the *fixed* Will of the Creator which they manifest would then have been needed. But since we are not merely the creatures but the

children of God, since we are destined for a life beyond the grave for which we are required in this life to make careful spiritual preparation, there is nothing at all unreasonable in the supposition that God should give us proof that the physical conditions which exist around us are not the only conditions in which we have an interest, and that our real spiritual life is to a great degree independent of them. Hence the special interruption of these ordinary physical conditions in connection with the special mission of the Teacher come from God, as awakening and convincing proof that God had indeed sent him: nor can anything be more unreasonable than to imagine that the gracious Father of our spirits has so bound and imprisoned himself within physical laws,—laws which he maintains and observes not for his own sake, but simply for the purpose of enabling his dependent children to discover and apply physical agencies,—as that he should be unable to communicate *directly* with his children on interests which infinitely transcend those agencies, and which no discovery or application of the laws by which those agencies are regulated could ever enable them to discern or prosecute. If it be in the power of every human parent to communicate immediately with his children by direct interchanges of thought and affection, why should the same be impossible with God? And if under a wise earthly parent's discipline, the intelligent child is taught and trained to subject the material to the spiritual, to maintain the supremacy of truth and conscience over every seeming outward interest or gratification, why should we not be all thus taught of God by his subjecting the laws of his physical universe to the higher laws of our mental

and spiritual culture, the *fixed* Will which he maintains with a view to our external comfort and improvement as sojourners on earth to the *free* Will which he manifests as the gracious Father of our spirits, in order to teach and remind us that our citizenship is in heaven? Nothing can be more unreasonable, in my judgment, nothing more essentially atheistic, than thus to shut out the Great Parent Spirit of the Universe from all *immediate* intercourse with his spiritual offspring: nothing, on the other hand, more essentially rational and religious, than to believe, on adequate historical testimony, that "God who, in "many parts and in many ways, spake unto the "ancestors of the Jewish nation by the prophets, "hath in these latter days spoken unto us by His Son "Jesus Christ."

(3.) The miracles recorded in the New Testament are, therefore, to be investigated, not according to the laws of physical science, but according to the laws of historical criticism. The questions that we have to ask in conducting this investigation, relate to incidents which are very remote from us both in time and place, and of which it is impossible for us to take any immediate personal cognizance. They cannot be tested by experiment; they cannot be verified by any effort we may make to reproduce the phenomena which they are recorded to have presented. Here is unquestionably a difficulty presented to our faith. Ought the perception of such a difficulty to surprise us? Ought it even to deter us altogether from further inquiry? If even the varied and long-continued investigations of physical science, with their wonderful and useful physical results, have afforded a new and more striking illustration to the truth of the

ancient maxim of heathen philosophy than that philosophy ever contemplated when it affirmed that "the gods give nothing to men without great labour," how much more reasonable is it to expect a larger demand for labour and perseverance with a view to the attainment of the highest spiritual blessings! Why should we expect the most sublime spiritual truth to be easiest of attainment? For the very reason that it appeals, not to our senses nor to our intelligence in its commonest applications, but to our spiritual consciousness and reflection, it demands of necessity the exercise of our noblest faculties for its reception and appreciation. Nor has it ever made any inferior demand. Among the countrymen and contemporaries of Jesus of Nazareth, his miracles wrought conviction not upon all the people; for the majority were then, as now, so preoccupied and engrossed with worldly views and expectations, that seeing they saw not, and hearing they heard not, neither could they understand. When they could not venture to deny the reality of his beneficent exercise of divine power, they were so far from accepting the only just and legitimate inference from it, that they had recourse to a moral and spiritual contradiction in order to evade that inference. "He casteth out demons (they alleged) by Beelzebub the prince of the demons." Such were the difficulties which the miracles of Jesus presented to their minds, because they had predetermined that "out of Galilee ariseth no prophet;" and that the Messiah for whom they were looking must be their present deliverer from the Roman yoke. Our difficulties in relation to these miracles are different in their details, but similar in the general spirit in which they originate. We are liable to what I

trust I have shown to be a very narrow and unphilosophical prejudgment of the whole inquiry. Our personal experience of the uniformity of outward nature indisposes us to the belief that this uniformity has ever been broken; and when we are required to look back and examine the records of a distant age and nation in order to carry out the investigation, the engrossing interests of things visible and present are apt to indispose us for the labour. Prejudice and worldliness are still, as they have ever been, the opponents of divine truth; and it should be no slight recommendation of the miracles of the gospel to the thoughtful and reverential mind, that they thus, at the very outset, make a demand on its concentrated and impartial attention, befitting the exalted nature of the revelation which the gospel itself claims to convey, and preparing both mind and heart for its intelligent and grateful acceptation. If there be indeed a God, who is not merely the former of our bodies, but also the Father of our spirits, nothing could be more consistent with his perfect wisdom or illustrative of his paternal character and love, than thus to make provision for calling forth and exercising the noblest spiritual powers of his spiritual offspring in the very character of the special instruction and aid which he offers them toward the attainment of the knowledge of himself and of his will, and of the desire and purpose of filial obedience and faith. The miracles which he wrought through Christ are no mere marvels; they are the direct and sacred utterances of his power and mercy in testimony of the mission of his Son. As such may we investigate them, as such may we (on conviction of their reality)

gratefully receive them and the divine Teacher to whom they bear witness; that his words of truth and of eternal life may enlighten our understandings and purify our hearts, and enable us through him to come unto his and our Father, and to share his rich inheritance of life and love. Amen.

LECTURE II.

MIRACLES CONSTITUTE THE TEXTURE OF THE GOSPELS:—THEIR VARIETY.

In considering what constitutes the specific difference of Miracles, we have defined them as exhibiting God's *free* will—free in relation to us—while nature exhibits his *fixed* will—fixed in relation to us. In relation to God himself, we have no warrant whatever for this or ten thousand other distinctions which our limited and imperfect views compel us to make in our endeavours to understand his character, government and will. We know only in part: and it is, and always must be throughout eternity, utterly vain for a created and dependent being to endeavour to place himself even in thought on the throne of God, and look abroad on the universe, material and spiritual, as God sees it. One great design of revelation is to warn us against the presumption and impiety of such an attempt: for

> "——— here the brightest seraphs can no more
> "Than veil their faces, tremble and adore:
> "Worms, angels, men, in every different sphere,
> "Are equal all,——— for all are nothing here."
>
> *Barbauld.*

We have seen that there is no *real*, though there is a very strong *primâ facie or apparent* objection to Miracles on philosophical grounds. That objection stands as a difficulty in our way at the very outset, for the very purpose of awakening our attention, and demanding our careful thought, and serious and patient investigation. In regard to truth of every kind it has been most justly said that "truth can never be received as a gift; it must be bought with a price:" and this is eminently characteristic of the highest truth. Hence it is that so few, comparatively, attain to it, because so few are willing to pay the price, so few even desire to pay the price, or care to know that there is any such truth to be attained.

In regard to all who are really in earnest *seeking* for religious truth, no one need ever fear the result to himself of intelligent, faithful, persevering inquiry. It is not so much in its objective as in its subjective character that religious truth blesses us: not so much, that is, the truth considered *in itself*, as the truth considered in its adaptation to our own minds and influence upon them, and as the result of the honest and persevering endeavours which we have made to attain it. We are compelled to labour for "the meat that perisheth," and even when we fail of obtaining it, we are the better for the labour: so, and for the same reason, are we compelled to labour for the "meat that endureth unto eternal life." In both cases alike, it is not so much the positive result as the conscientious preliminary labour that blesses us. Hence there are equally good men and good Christians of all religious denominations; because in all religious denominations men are to be found who faithfully and earnestly inquire after religious truth

and endeavour consistently to avow and maintain it. The mere possession of religious truth objectively may be no blessing at all. Therefore writes the Apostle James, (ii. 19) "Thou believest that there "is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe "and tremble." They cannot resist the intellectual conviction, which however only fills them with dread and does not arouse them to repentance.

This being so, it is manifestly as sinful in any man to endeavour to force his own convictions of religious truth upon others, as it is to neglect the means of forming such convictions himself. The latter of these two evil tendencies is now the more extensively prevalent, at least in the religious communion to which we belong. We need to be continually reminded of the wise and practical declaration of Channing, so apt to be forgotten in the midst of the hurry and merely sensational excitement of the age in which we live. "Thought, thought is the "fundamental distinction of mind and the great work "of life. All that a man does outwardly, is but the "expression and completion of his inward thought. "To work effectually, he must think clearly. To act "nobly, he must think nobly. Intellectual force is a "principal element of the soul's life, and should be "proposed by every man as a principal end of his "being. It is common to distinguish between the "intellect and the conscience, between the power of "thought and virtue, and to say that virtuous action "is worth more than strong thinking. But we muti-"late our nature by thus drawing lines between "actions or energies of the soul which are inti-"mately, indissolubly bound together. The head "and heart are not more vitally connected than

"thought and virtue. Does not conscience include, "as a part of itself, the noblest action of the intellect "or reason? Do we not degrade it by making it a "mere feeling? Is it not something more? Is it "not a wise discernment of the right, the holy, the "good? Take away thought from virtue, and what "remains worthy of a man? Is not high virtue "more than blind instinct? Is it not founded on "and does it not include clear, bright perceptions of "what is lovely and grand in character and action? "Without power of thought, what we call conscien-"tiousness or a desire to do right, shoots out into "illusion, exaggeration, pernicious excess. The most "cruel deeds on earth have been perpetrated in the "name of conscience. Men have hated and mur-"dered one another from a sense of duty. The worst "frauds have taken the name of pious. Thought, "intelligence, is the dignity of a man; and no man "is rising but in proportion as he is learning to think "clearly and forcibly, or directing the energy of his "mind to the acquisition of truth. Every man, in "whatsoever condition, is to be a student. No matter "what other vocation he may have, his chief vocation "is TO THINK."*

To this I add, as a just and necessary application of this sentiment, in consideration of the supreme importance of *religious* truth to our moral and spiritual welfare, that it signifies not at all what other subject of thought a man investigates: the most important and most elevating for every man who is cognizant of its existence at all, is the divine

* Channing, on the Elevation of the Labouring Portion of the Community; Lecture I.

authority of Christ and of his holy gospel, with a view to intelligent, faithful and persevering obedience to it.

The true spirit of philosophy is the spirit of honest, fearless, patient and persevering inquiry, whether directed on the works or on the ways of God. In every age of the world, the great hindrance to the discovery of truth has been that the minds of men have been so prepossessed with their own arbitrary and baseless theories, that they have been neither able nor willing to look at facts. It was not, therefore, till the time of Francis Bacon that the true method of philosophizing, by inquiring into and investigating the *actual* state of things, was at all generally recognized; and even now that method is, in many very important cases, frequently set aside. It was so, at the beginning of the present century in regard to Geology: it is so still in regard to the Miracles of Christianity. I have shown that this ought not to be; that there is nothing unreasonable in the supposition that God should give us special proof that the physical conditions of our earthly life are not the highest and noblest conditions with which we have to do, but that our real spiritual life is independent of them.

Hence the question which we are considering is to be answered by an appeal to fact and to the records of that fact in history. Miracles, which we have already seen to be the credentials of divine authority in him by whom or in whose name they are wrought, were, by their very nature, capable of being observed, so far as regards their outward and visible circumstances, by men of ordinary perceptions, and fully and faithfully attested by them. Where is the original

record of their observation and testimony? In the Gospels and no where else. Let us, then, turn to these Gospels, and observe,

(1.) How entirely the very texture of these records of Christ's ministry is made up of the record of Miracles.

Take the gospel of St. Mark, as being the shortest of the four, and yet the fullest in most of its details: and you will see on investigation that if the record of Miracles be taken out, there is absolutely *nothing* intelligible or coherent left. The ordinary divisions into chapters and verses, though liable to many objections on other grounds, will effectually serve our present purpose. There are *sixteen* chapters in this entire gospel, of which the first *ten* contain the records of the whole of Christ's public ministry except the last six days, the details of which, in connection with his last passover in Jerusalem, his sufferings, death, and resurrection, occupy the remainder of the gospel. Thus these first *ten* chapters record the whole of Christ's ministry except its close, and the history of that close would be altogether unmeaning and unintelligible without them. Now these ten chapters consist of 425 verses; and of this number, 225 verses, or more than half, are occupied with the details of Christ's actual Miracles, while the remaining 200 verses have no historical meaning at all except on the acknowledgment that these Miracles had been actually wrought. For brevity's sake, I shall confine our attention, then, entirely to these first *ten* chapters. The events that are recorded in the last six chapters are so indissolubly bound up with the events recorded in these first ten, that they need no detailed investigation for the purpose of

establishing the position which I am maintaining that *the accounts of Miracles constitute the very texture of the Evangelical Records.*

Before commencing this brief survey, let us call to mind who Jesus was, and whence and what his claim. He was simply a Galilean peasant, the son of a carpenter, and himself following his father's occupation; a citizen of Nazareth, a despised city of the despised province of Galilee, out of which, (according to the interpretation of their Scriptures by the Jewish Sanhedrim)——"out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." (John vii. 52.) Yet this unknown Galilean peasant is set before us as claiming to be received as not simply a prophet, but one greater than any prophet or all the prophets put together; the long expected Messiah. How absurd such a claim by such a person, unless sustained by adequate credentials! Accordingly such credentials are everywhere recorded in connection with it:—special manifestations of Divine power in attestation of the special mission of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us hastily pass in review the brief summary of its contents which is prefixed, in our Authorized Version, to each of these ten chapters, in order that we may receive the *just impression* of the prevalent recognition of these credentials. It is essential to the reception of this *just impression* that this brief summary be *attentively* read *in detail.*

Chapter i. 1. *The office of John the Baptist,* involves special miraculous appointment, though John himself did no miracle: the Christ, whose forerunner he had been, was himself the full and sufficient and miraculously appointed vindicator of John's title to this special office. (9) *Jesus is baptized:* miracu-

lous appearance and voice. (12) *Tempted:* his very temptation consisted in his consciousness of the special endowments which he had just received for his special work. (14) *He preacheth:* (16) *calleth Peter, Andrew, James, and John:* his general appeal, as well as his special summons to these apostles, derived all its authority from the miraculous incidents previously mentioned. (23) *Healeth one that had a demon,* (29) *Peter's mother in law,* (32) *many diseased persons,* (41) *and cleanseth the leper:* these are are all express records of miracles.

Chapter ii. 1. *Christ healeth one sick of the palsy.* This is the only record of miracle in this chapter, but it is immediately followed by the statement (12, 13) that, obviously in consequence of this miracle, "all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them," and then (14) by the account of the *call of Matthew,* and by his vindication of himself for (15) *eating with publicans and sinners* in Matthew's house; of his disciples (18) *for not fasting,* (23) *and for plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath day:*—all in answer to appeals made to him in connection with each of these incidents by men who thereby necessarily recognized him as *claiming* to be a teacher from God.

Chapter iii. 1. *Christ healeth the withered hand,* (10) *and many other infirmities;* (11) *rebuketh the unclean spirits.* These are express miracles. (13) *Chooseth his twelve apostles:* (22) *convicteth the scribes of blasphemy for alleging that he cast out demons by Beelzebub:* (31) *and sheweth who are his brother and sister and mother.* These all *imply* miracles. His apostles answered his summons because they recognized his divine authority; the scribes con-

fessed his cure of demoniacs by assigning it to the prince of the demons; and the multitude crowded around him so that the members of his own family could not approach him, because they already recognized him as "a man from God."

With the like *implication* of miracles,

Chapter iv. 1—34 records the parables which presently afterwards Jesus delivered to the multitude standing on the shore of lake of Galilee, while he himself addressed them from a vessel a little out at sea. (35) *Christ stilleth the tempest on the sea:* an express miracle.

Chapter v. 1. *Christ delivering the possessed of the legion of demons,* (13) *they enter into the swine.* (25) *He healeth the woman of the bloody issue,* (35) *and raiseth from the dead Jairus' daughter.* All express miracles.

Chapter vi. 1. *Christ is contemned by his countrymen:* in consequence of which we are expressly told that (5) "he could do there no mighty work," i. e. no very striking or impressive miracle, as it would have savoured of ostentation to do it before men whose strong prejudices rendered it impossible for them to draw the just inference from it; "save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them;"—his compassion prompting and vindicating these acts of mercy, the record of which is the record of express miracles. (7—33) records the mission of the twelve apostles with miraculous powers which they exercised, and their return to Jesus on occasion of the execution of his forerunner the Baptist by Herod the tetrarch; as also various opinions concerning Jesus, including the distinct recognition of his miracles (14) by Herod himself. (34—56) records the miracles of

the five loaves feeding the five thousand, of Christ's walking on the sea, and of his healing all that touched him:—all express miracles.

Chapter vii. 1—23. Our Saviour authoritatively reproves the Pharisees for their traditional ceremonies, and proclaims the true doctrine of spiritual purity. (24) *He healeth the Syrophenician woman's daughter of an unclean spirit,* (31) *and one that was deaf, and stammered in his speech.* The first part of the chapter records his exercise of his authority as a religious teacher, the last his exercise of the miraculous powers by which that authority was vindicated and maintained.

Chapter viii. 1. *Christ feedeth the people miraculously;* (10) *refuseth to give a sign to the Pharisees;* (14) *admonisheth his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod.* Here we have first a miracle; then the refusal of a special exertion of miraculous power which would necessarily have misled those who witnessed it by confirming all their worldly expectations of the Messiah's kingdom; and then a conversation with his disciples in which their distinct recognition of his recent miracles constitutes the very basis of his argument. (22) *Giveth a blind man his sight:* (27—38) His disciples acknowledge his special divine mission as the Christ, whereupon he expressly foretels his crucifixion and resurrection, and exhorts to patience under persecution for the profession of the gospel. This last record depends, therefore, altogether upon the recognition of miracle.

Chapter ix. 2. *Jesus is transfigured, whereupon he instructs his disciples concerning the coming of Elias:* (14) *casteth forth a deaf and dumb spirit:* an express

miracle. The remainder of the chapter records his conversations with the Apostles in the avowed character of the Christ, their Teacher and Lord.

Chapter x. in like manner records chiefly the discussions and discourses of Jesus with those who resorted to him either to try (2) or to acknowledge (13—31) his authority as a teacher from God; and (32—45) his own renewed declaration of his final sufferings: but at the close (46—52) it records the restoration of sight to blind Bartimæus: an immediate and very impressive miracle.

Thus the records of Christ's personal ministry, contained in these ten chapters of St. Mark's gospel, consist of either the direct record of his miracles, or the record of incidents which would be altogether inexplicable and incredible if the authority which he assumed as a Teacher from God had not been attested by miracles. Take away the direct record of miracles, and more than a full half of this entire history is destroyed; while the remainder, regarded by itself, presents a confused and unintelligible statement of assumptions on the part of Jesus, and deferential or hostile excitement on the part of his countrymen and contemporaries, which would be justly deemed quite incredible as a legend, and, so severed from its connection, has no claim whatever to the character of an authentic history.

There is absolutely, therefore, no middle course between receiving the record of the miracles as authentic, or rejecting the record which we have been reviewing altogether. Against the latter alternative must ever stand the unquestionable fact that the Gospel of Christ, as learned primarily from these and the corresponding records *alone* and from no other

history whatever, has been, for more than eighteen centuries, "the great power of God" among men, effecting changes in our modern civilization of a very marked and permanent character, for which no adequate cause can be assigned if this "great power" be denied. On the other hand, the former alternative is strongly recommended to our acceptance by certain characteristics of these Miracles which we shall proceed in conclusion to notice.

(2.) The great *variety* of these miracles, in themselves and in the circumstances under which they were wrought, together with the invariable uniformity of their result, is a striking evidence of their reality.

Had the miracles recorded to have been wrought by Jesus been all of one kind, or wrought in only particular circumstances, they would not, I think, have been deserving of any credit. How many are the wonders which a skilful juggler can exhibit, and which altogether elude detection by the uninitiated even on the closest investigation: but take him out of his accustomed and practised routine, and he can accomplish nothing wonderful at all. So again, when times and circumstances are all arranged beforehand, it is not difficult to produce seeming effects which would be altogether impossible without such previous arrangement. Hence it is very important, in connection with the records of our Saviour's miracles, to note the great *variety* which is exhibited both in the miracles themselves and in the circumstances under which they were wrought.

(a.) Let us notice the great variety which is observable in the Miracles themselves. In some of them our Saviour is the agent, in others he is himself the subject. Of those in which Jesus is the immediate

agent, the variety in their character is very observable. He cures all diseases ascribed to demoniacal possession—(madness, epilepsy, and such like)—by casting out the supposed demon; a plain evidence in itself that this was no scientific process nor the result of any superior scientific knowledge to which Jesus had attained; since modern science entirely disproves the whole theory of demoniacal possession, though that theory was universally accepted by Jesus and his countrymen and contemporaries, and generally throughout the world until within almost the commencement of the present century of the Christian era. By his word he cleanses the lepers, restores strength to the paralytic, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, enables the lame to walk, invigorates the halt and the withered, and raises the dead to life. In all these cases the subjects of his benevolent miracles are intelligent beings like himself. In other cases, inanimate objects bear testimony to the Divine power intrusted to him; as when, during the marriage festival at Cana, he changed the water into wine; when, on two separate occasions, he multipled a few loaves and fishes so as to supply the craving hunger of a vast multitude, thousands of men, women, and children, in the desert; and when, on other occasions, he stilled a violent tempest on the lake, and trod the lake itself as a marble pavement beneath his feet. On other occasions he was himself the *subject* of miracle: as when, without his previous knowledge or concurrence, the woman suffering from an issue of blood was cured by touching the hem of his garment; and when he himself underwent some marvellous change on the mount of transfiguration: while both at his baptism, and subsequently in Jerusalem, a voice from heaven

declared his divine commission and authority, which were finally confirmed by his glorious resurrection from the dead.

(b.) Equally various were the circumstances, both of time and situation, in which the miracles of our Saviour were wrought. At all hours of the day, in the presence of multitudes and of a chosen few, in the synagogue, in the streets, in the house, on the lake, in the wilderness, among those who sought his aid, and those who derided him when he was preparing to give it, as in the case of the hired mourners in the house of Jairus.

(c.) Yet amidst all this variety of miracle and circumstance, one great result was always attained: every miracle accomplished its purpose; not one failed of accomplishing it. Therefore the multitudes thronged Jesus to be healed; and so numerous were his miracles that the writers of the supplement to the fourth gospel, having given their solemn testimony to the truth of St. John's narrative, add, in the language of hyperbole natural to them as orientals, "And there "are also many other things which Jesus did, the "which, if they should be written every one, I sup- "pose that even the world itself could not contain "the books that should be written." (John xxi. 25.) Yet every miracle wrought by him stood the test of the strictest examination. The Sanhedrim after the closest inquiry could not deny that the man born blind had received his sight, so they excommunicated him: they could not deny the cure of the demoniacs, but ascribed it to the power of Beelzebub: they could not deny that Lazarus, who had been dead, had been raised to life from the grave, but began to devise plans for murdering Lazarus as well as Jesus, because

through Lazarus many went away and believed on Jesus. This unfailing success attendant on the use of the means employed, in connection with such widely various objects and circumstances, is of itself an evidence that those means were of no ordinary human character, but that the results obtained were wrought (as Jesus who wrought them expressly declared) by the mighty power of the Father who dwelt in him and who had sent him.

The record of Miracles we see, then, constitutes the very texture of the Gospel narratives; and assuming this record to be true, we discover in this circumstance a very instructive explanation of the mode in which the facts recorded took form in our present Gospels. Such events had, by their very nature, a necessity for passing into some such form; for such things as Jesus said and did could not but make such an impression on those in whose presence they transpired, as would demand to be reported and circulated in every possible shape. "The great reason, be it well considered, why "it is not perceived that the existence of these won- "derful documents was a sheer necessity, is that the "nature of their contents is not fully apprehended. "We do not distinctly conceive how real and vivid "they were; how original, and yet at the same time "how thoroughly simple and clearly defined, were the "acts and words of the Man of Nazareth. These "things are so feebly pourtrayed to our imaginations, "they are so thin and visionary, that it never occurs "to us to consider the impression which they must "have made on the minds of people at the time: they "have made little or none on ours. We do not allow "for the effects and consequeuces of that impression. "Accordingly we do not perceive the living connection

" which there is between the life of Christ and these " histories of his life. We do not see how naturally " these grew out of that. Histories of this sort had " to appear, supposing the things they relate actually " to have taken place."*

Thus as the very texture of the gospel narratives consists of the record of Miracles, and this record of Miracles *must*, therefore, be received if the gospels themselves be received, so the variety of character and circumstance, with the unvaryingly successful result recorded in connection with the Miracles themselves, make it altogether inconceivable that they should have been wrought by mere human agency, or should have been only the specious illusions of fanaticism or fraud. Accept the gospel history at all, and you must accept the history of the Miracles: accept the history of the Miracles, and in no other way are they susceptible of a rational explanation than as being what they are alleged to have been,—mighty works which God himself wrought by Jesus of Nazareth in proof that he was, as he professed himself, "a man from God." As such we receive and honour him as our Teacher and Lord, and through him ascribe glory to God whom he has clearly revealed as our Father in heaven. Amen.

* This quotation is from an admirable article on the Origin of the Gospels, in the *American Christian Examiner*, January, 1861: pp. 49—77.

LECTURE III.

MIRACLES INTRODUCED AND ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANITY IN HISTORICAL TIMES.

I HAVE shown that Miracles are philosophically possible and therefore credible as the Credentials of a Teacher from God and of his divine commission. Whether any such Teacher with such a commission from God has ever appeared in our world, is a question of fact to be determined by appeal to historical records. To such records, accordingly, we have made our appeal, and have found throughout, that the instructions of the Teacher who came from God have been given with authority, and that that authority was confirmed by Miracles; and further, that his Miracles have been so numerous and varied in themselves and in their circumstances, yet so unfailingly effectual for their immediate object, as to leave no room for doubt or suspicion as to their genuineness. They could not have been wrought by any practically acquired skill, nor could they have been imposed upon the observers by being wrought under previously arranged circumstances favourable to deception.

These important positions cannot reasonably be denied, if the events recorded took place in historical times, and if the records of them can be shown to be essentially worthy of credit. To the proof of these points I shall now address myself.

(1.) Christianity itself was introduced into the world and established by these Miracles *in an historical age:* i. e., in an age which is not mythical or legendary, but clearly and distinctly historical, and in which numerous histories, still universally received as credible, were actually written.

The reign of Augustus, in which Jesus Christ was born, was rendered illustrious as *the golden age* of Roman literature by the Roman poets and historians who then flourished, and whose works are come down to our own times: viz. Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Livy, and others: and during the remainder of the first century of our era, while the Gospel was still being preached throughout all the world, we have Seneca the philosopher, Lucan the poet, the Jewish historian Josephus, the naturalist Pliny the elder, the philosopher and historian Plutarch, the satirist Juvenal, the epigrammatist Martial, the rhetorician Quintilian, the historians Tacitus and Suetonius, the philosopher Epictetus, and Pliny the younger, the author of the Epistles. Thus the age in which Christianity was introduced into the world was not merely an age the events of which are recorded in contemporary history, but was an age remarkable for its literary and philosophical culture and attainments. It might perhaps be anticipated that, under these circumstances, very numerous and extended references would be made in the writings just enumerated to the wonderful events which are recorded to have taken place in Judæa

through the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and subsequently of his Apostles. Such, however, is not really the fact; and a little consideration will suffice to convince us that such an anticipation would be unreasonable. Remember, then, that Christianity originated entirely among the Jews; a people held in subjection by the Romans and regarded by them with all that contempt and scorn with which victorious despots in every age are wont to look down upon those whom they hold in thraldom and use only as the victims of their avarice and cruelty: and that, in the case of the Jews, every ordinary cause of alienation was intensified by the circumstance that the Jews, in the pride of their heaven-descended faith, abhorred the heathen, and were in return abhorred by the heathen as the common enemies of mankind, because they would not join in any idol worship, or recognize any of those varied symbols of Deity which the system of polytheism, elsewhere universally prevalent, taught all the rest of the world to revere as sacred. Hence while they were oppressed by their Roman masters with grievous exactions and cruelties, they were also loathed by them as atheists, inasmuch as they refused to acknowledge any of the popular gods. To suppose that, under these circumstances, the haughty and luxurious Romans would care to inquire very minutely into events which were taking place in this remote province of their empire and among a people so universally detested and despised, even when vague rumours of them reached their ears, is to suppose what is contrary to all ordinary human experience: and therefore all that we can reasonably anticipate is that, among these numerous writers, an occasional and, most likely, a very confused reference

should be found to the momentous transactions connected with the ministry of Christ and his Apostles. We have no right whatever to expect that these references should be either very clear and accurate, or very numerous.

And such is, accordingly, the real state of the case. Among the writers just enumerated, the references to Christianity are comparatively few and brief and confused. Such are those in the writings of Suetonius, Juvenal, Martial, and Epictetus, as given in Lardner's Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, and copied thence in Paley's Evidences of Christianity. The most distinct and extended notice is that by the historian Tacitus, in his Annals; where after narrating the event of the great fire in Rome in the reign of Nero, and mentioning the odium under which the Emperor lay as the suspected author of the calamity, he proceeds thus:—

"In order to do away with this report, Nero caused
"to be accused and subjected to the most exquisite
"punishments, those who were commonly known as
"Christians and hateful for their crimes. The origi-
"nator of this name was one Christus, who was put
"to death as a criminal under the procurator Pontius
"Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. His destructive
"superstition, though repressed for awhile, broke out
"again, not only throughout Judæa where the evil
"had begun, but also through the city of Rome,
"where all things atrocious or shameful from all
"quarters meet and publish themselves. Accordingly
"some were arrested who confessed themselves Chris-
"tians; and then, on their information, a great mul-
"titude were convicted, not so much on the charge
"of incendiarism as of hatred to mankind. And they

" were put to death with circumstances of wanton " derision; being covered with the hides of beasts " and worried to death by dogs, or crucified, or burnt " to death as the day declined to serve for lights in " the night. Nero had offered his own gardens for " these sights, and used to exhibit the games of the " circus, habiting himself as a charioteer and mixing " with the populace, or himself driving a chariot. " Hence though these people were guilty wretches " and deserved extreme punishment, yet compassion " began to arise towards them, as being destroyed for " no public good but to gratify the cruelty of one " man."—*Annal.* xv. 44.

Such is the record of events occurring in Rome in the reign of Nero, A.D. 65, little more than thirty years from the death of Christ. " Certainly," says Dr. Lardner, " the great number of Christians at " Rome at this time and their sufferings, are two " things very observable. The pity too which these " sufferings excited shows that they were not really " monsters of wickedness: their supposed guilt " consisted simply in this, that they neglected the " ordinary worship of the gods."—*Abridged from Lardner's Testimonies: Tacitus.*

And not less observable, I add, is the undesigned confirmation which this brief and supercilious record gives to the Evangelical Narratives, which were probably being written by their respective authors, and of course quite independently, about the very time of which this record by Tacitus treats. When, however, we advance onwards about forty years and read the letter of Pliny the younger, who was proconsul of Bithynia, to the emperor Trajan, A.D. 108, this confirmation becomes so greatly strengthened that I

know not how its power can be reasonably resisted. Though this letter has been very frequently published, it seems to me desirable to give it here at full length, in order that its very clear and powerful testimony may be duly appreciated by the reader of these Lectures. The translation is that given by Dr. Lardner in his "Testimonies of Ancient Heathens—The Younger Pliny."

"Pliny to the emperor Trajan wisheth health and "happiness. It is my constant custom, Sir, to refer "myself to you in all matters concerning which I "have any doubt. For who can better direct me "where I hesitate, or instruct me where I am igno-"rant? I have never been present at any trials of "Christians; so that I know not well what is the "subject matter of punishment or of inquiry, or what "strictness ought to be used in either. Nor have I "been a little perplexed to determine whether any "difference ought to be made upon account of age, or "whether the young and tender, and the full-grown "and robust, ought to be treated all alike: whether "repentance should entitle to pardon, or whether all "who have once been Christians ought to be punished "though they are now no longer so: whether the "name itself although no crimes be detected, or "crimes only belonging to the name ought to be "punished. Concerning all these things I am in "doubt.

"In the mean time I have taken this course with "all who have been brought before me and have been "accused as Christians. I have put the question to "them whether they were Christians. Upon their "confessing to me that they were, I repeated the "question a second and a third time, threatening also

"to punish them with death. Such as still persisted,
"I ordered away to be punished: for it was no doubt
"with me, whatever might be the nature of their
"opinions, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy
"ought to be punished. There were others of the
"same infatuation, whom, because they are Roman
"citizens, I have noted down to be sent to the city.

"In a short time, the crime spreading itself even
"whilst under persecution, as is usual in such cases,
"divers sorts of people came in my way. An infor-
"mation was presented to me without mentioning the
"author, containing the names of many persons who,
"upon examination, denied that they were Christians
"or had ever been so; who repeated after me an
"invocation of the gods, and with wine and frankin-
"cense made supplication to your image, which for
"that purpose I have caused to be brought and set
"before them, together with the statues of the deities.
"Moreover they reviled the name of Christ: none of
"which things, as is said, they who are really Chris-
"tians can by any means be compelled to do. These,
"therefore, I thought proper to discharge.

"Others were named by an informer, who at first
"confessed themselves Christians and afterwards
"denied it. The rest said they had been Christians
"but had left them; some three years ago, some
"longer, and one or more above twenty years. They
"all worshipped your image and the statues of the
"gods; these also reviled Christ. They affirmed that
"the whole of their fault or error lay in this, that
"they were wont to meet together on a stated day
"before it was light, and sing among themselves
"alternately a hymn to Christ as a god, and bind
"themselves by an oath not to the commission of any

" wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft or robbery " or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny " a pledge committed to them when called upon to " return it. When these things were performed, it " was their custom to separate, and then to come " together again to a meal which they ate in common " without any disorder: but this they had forborne " since the publication of my edict by which, accord- " ing to your commands, I prohibited assemblies.

" After receiving this account, I judged it more " necessary to examine, and that by torture, two maid " servants which were called ministers: but I have " discovered nothing beside a bad and excessive super- " stition.

" Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I " have recourse to you for advice: for it has appeared " unto me a matter highly deserving consideration, " especially upon account of the great number of " persons who are in danger of suffering. For many " of all ages and every rank, of both sexes likewise, " are accused and will be accused. Nor has the con- " tagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the " lesser towns also and the open country. Neverthe- " less it seemed to me that it may be restrained and " corrected. It is certain that the temples, which " were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented; " and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermis- " sion, are revived. Victims likewise are every where " bought up, whereas for some time there were few " purchasers. Whence it is easy to imagine what " numbers of men might be reclaimed if pardon were " granted to those who shall repent."

In this letter Pliny writes of the Christians as a religious denomination then well known to the

Emperor Trajan as to himself, and that their worship had almost put an end to the established idolatry in his province, until his active measures for the repression of Christianity had caused the sacred solemnities of that idolatry "after a long intermission" to be revived. He also bears the most explicit testimony to the firmness of very many of these Christians in the maintenance of their faith, notwithstanding the terrible persecution to which they were subject; to the purity of their religion and its morality, and to the desire which they had shown to render all lawful obedience to the constituted authorities by forbearing the assemblies which he had prohibited.

This evidence clearly and irrefragably proves that Christianity was now established in the Roman empire, and that the Chistianity established was the very Christianity which we find in our gospels. How it was thus established, these same gospels as distincly teach us: and a very little consideration will be sufficient, I think, to satisfy any intelligent man that in no other way could Christianity have been introduced and established at all. Well writes the present Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Whately, on this point regarding the Apostles, in his admirable little work published anonymously and entitled "Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences:"—a work which I cannot too earnestly recommend to the attentive study of all who desire to know the truth on this important subject.

"If they (the Apostles) had come among the gen-
"tiles teaching the most sublime religious doctrine
"and trusting merely to the excellence of what they
"taught, it is impossible they should have even had
"a hearing. It is not enough to say that no one

"would have *believed* them; but no one would even "have *listened* to them if they had not first roused "men's serious attention by working, as we are told "they did, 'remarkable [special] miracles.' Acts xix. "11."—*Lesson* vii. § 5.

Admit these miracles by the Apostles recorded in the Acts, and much more, *(à fortiori)* must you admit those recorded in the gospels as wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ himself; since it is in his very name and by his express authority that the Apostles everywhere interpret the miracles which *they* wrought.

The fact that Christianity was thus introduced and established in the world *in an historical age* is farther important, because the very numerous historical references which the New Testament contains are thereby capable of being investigated and verified by appeal to the works of contemporary writers. It is because so many persons in these days, satisfying themselves with formal creeds or a mere traditional belief, do not themselves go into the interior detail of Scripture, that Christian conviction in such numerous instances can hardly be said to exist at all, and is frequently so weak and vague, so like a mere superstition, where perhaps it does actually exist. Having many times in my life read through critically every one of the four Gospels—(to say nothing now of the other Scriptures of the New Testament)—I hesitate not distinctly to affirm that there is not a single chapter, and scarcely indeed a single paragraph throughout the whole of them which does not yield, on careful investigation, evidence which is regarded in connection with every other history as conclusive of its truth; and I leave here on record my solemn and fearless appeal to those adult members of my congregation who have accom-

panied me in this critical reading, to say whether there is any exaggeration in this statement.

Having thus exhibited some of what may be called for distinction's sake the *external* evidences of the truth of the Gospel, let us next attend to those which are afforded by the writings of the New Testament considered in themselves.

(2.) The consistency of the Christian Scriptures among themselves is a conclusive evidence of their truth. We will notice this consistency under three distinct heads:—

(a.) The unity of the personality and character of Christ as exhibited by the Four Evangelists, and of the subordinate personages severally who are brought before us in the course of their history.

This unity of the personality and character of Christ as exhibited by the Four Evangelists is substantially assumed by all writers on the subject, by those who reject Christianity as well as by those who accept it. Not that the representation given by each Evangelist may not perhaps be shown, on minute critical investigation, to exhibit some very occasional traces of his own individual mental perception and habit of thought, so far distinguishing it from the representation of either of the others: but this is so far from invalidating that it positively confirms the substantial unity, since it proves that there was indeed but one living Original whom all have endeavoured to pourtray, inasmuch as the portraiture drawn by each exhibits essentially one and the same person, while at the same time it also exhibits the special view of him taken by each separate biographer. Generally speaking, however, there is a remarkable absence of all personal colouring, especially in the first three gospels.

As regards subordinate personages also, how distinct are our impressions of Peter and John, Martha and Mary! to cite no farther illustrations. In reference to these sisters, the observations of the Rev. W. H. Furness, of Philadelphia, in his admirable work entitled "Remarks on the Four Gospels," will well repay an attentive perusal. The following very brief extracts will show their general character.

"Now there is no attempt to describe the distinc-
"tive qualities of these two individuals. They occupy
"only a small space in the scene. They appear before
"us but for a moment at a time, and they say and do
"but little. And yet they stand out with wonderful
"distinctness. Their images are not blended and
"intermixed. Their characteristic features are un-
"veiled in the most incidental manner—by a word:
"a breath lifts the veil, and their faces once seen are
"never to be confounded." (pp. 77, 78.) "* * *
"I am reminded in this connection by the force of
"contrast of the well known romance of 'the Pirate.'
"If so familiar an illustration may be allowed, we have
"only to observe the care which the novelist has
"taken to discriminate the characters of Minna and
"Brenda, to perceive how immeasurably more striking
"is the brief scriptural representation of Mary and
"Martha. In the novel, every thing is done to assist
"the conceptions of the reader by a minute personal
"description of the two heroines, and they are thrown
"into circumstances calculated to bring out their
"respective peculiarities in the most prominent man-
"ner. Whereas in those rapid sketches of the New
"Testament, the incidents which so consistently and
"admirably unfold the characters of Mary and Mar-
"tha, are told with the utmost brevity, and if for the

" sake of showing off any one, it is with a view to the " character of Christ. But natural even as such a " design might be, it does not appear to have been " entertained. The occurrences related, with all the " light they throw upon the moral features of the " individuals concerned, seem to be mentioned for no " reason but their simple truth. They had taken " place. They were real, and therefore they were " related." (p. 82.)

It is in the midst of such occurrences be it remembered, *related because they are real*, that all the Miracles are related also, and with the same explicitness and simplicity. How can we reasonably evade the very obvious inference that the Miracles also are *related because they are real too.*

(b.) The *undesigned coincidences* pointed out by Paley in his Horæ Paulinæ, between the letters of St. Paul and his history in the Acts of the Apostles, constitute an argument for the truth of the gospels and the reality of the miracles recorded in them which I have never seen even impugned, and which cannot, I think, by possibility be reasonably set aside. In this argument, he assumes neither the genuineness of the letters nor the truth of the history. "The reader is " at liberty to suppose these writings (says he) to " have been lately discovered in the library of the " Escurial, and to come to our hands destitute of any " extrinsic or collateral evidence whatever: and the " argument I am about to offer is calculated to show " that a comparison of the different writings would, " even under these circumstances, afford good reason " to believe the persons and transactions to have been " real, the letters authentic, and the narration in the " main to be true." And most clearly and conclu-

sively indeed *does* he show this, as every one who has attentively read his admirable work must, I think, freely and gratefully acknowledge.

(c.) A further argument derived from these same epistles of St. Paul has a yet more direct and powerful bearing on this question of Miracles. I abridge it from an admirable work entitled "The Restoration of Belief," and published anonymously at Cambridge in three successive parts in the years 1852 and 1855: the pages throughout being numbered consecutively.

"Of the fourteen Epistles attributed to St. Paul, "[including, therefore, the epistle to the Hebrews,] "as many as nine contain no allusion to miraculous "occurrences or to miraculous gifts. Of these nine, "four are addressed to individuals who were the "Writer's intimates and colleagues. Five are con-"gregational addresses sent to those four Societies "with the religious condition of which the Writer "was in the main well content. With these there "was no serious controversy in hand; nor any personal "contest making it needful for him to sustain his "apostolic authority. The faith of these, his personal "friends, and of these attached and obedient converts, "was, like his own—it was a 'full assurance of faith'— "a faith to which miracles could add no steadfastness. "So it was that when no motive suggested a reference "to supernatural attestations, none appear." (p. 150). A plain evidence this that St. Paul had no disposition to foster those excitements which the supernatural supplies. On the contrary, in the five remaining Epistles, viz., Romans, I. and II. Corinthians, Galatians, and Hebrews, (assuming this latter to be St. Paul's,) there are distinct affirmations of miracles, or clear allusions to them as of present occurrence:

and these are the very Epistles, let it be observed, in which Paul "encounters his adversaries, and adminis- "ters sharp rebukes even to his attached adherents." (p. 205.) Had no miracles been wrought, how entirely destructive of St. Paul's credit and authority would have been such an appeal!

Thus, whether we examine the records of Christianity with reference to other writings or with reference to themselves, the stamp of Miracle is equally seen to be impressed upon them: and if we pursue the history of these records a little farther, we shall see strong additional reason for believing that they were received as records of the supernatural, and reverenced as specially Divine. This further advance let us now make.

(3.) "Time blots out the fictions of mere un- "founded opinion, but confirms the judgments which "are in accordance with truth."* Thus writes the eminently enlightened and philosophic Cicero more than half a century before the Christian era. Let us apply his test to the writings of the New Testament.

These very writings, whose *texture*, as we have seen, is *the record of Miracles*, found such continued and widely extended acceptance, that within the brief space of 150 years from the writing of the earliest of St. Paul's epistles, we find in the remaining works of three of the Christian Fathers, and these too at nearly opposite extremities of the great Roman Empire, and though some works of each of them are lost, "perhaps "more and larger quotations of the small volume of "the New Testament, than of all the works of Cicero,

* Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat. Cicero de Naturâ Deorum, ii. 2.

"though of so uncommon excellence for thought and "style, in the writers of all characters for several ages."* The Christian Fathers whom Lardner mentions are Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, A.D. 178; Clement, of Alexandria in Africa, A.D. 192; and Tertullian, a presbyter of Carthage in Africa, celebrated for his Apology, A.D. 200. It seems to me impossible to give any rational account of this very early and very wide diffusion of these Writings which does not recognize their *sacred* character and authority, while this diffusion itself is an evidence that the Christianity which they record was introduced and established by Miracle.

Thus is Christianity shown *by historical testimony* to have been introduced and established by Miracle. It is, therefore, altogether idle, irrelevant and delusive, to appeal to the mere legendary marvels of distant oriental nations as having any bearing whatever upon this subject, or to cite, as in the least degree analogous to the clear records of Miracle in our Gospels, the rude mythical sculptures which were chiselled out among them ages before even the first dawnings among them of any thing like a literature or a history. Equally idle, irrelevant and delusive is it to refer to accounts of miracles said to have been wrought in confirmation of a faith which was *already* established; or of miracles which were all of one kind and exhibited under one set of circumstances; as those at the tomb of the Abbè du Paris in the last century, A.D. 1727—1732. Such cases are so far from being *like* the case of Christianity, that they stand *in direct contrast* with it. In the case of Christianity, we believe that Miracles were really wrought, because we

* Lardner's Credibility: Recapitulation, ch. xxix.

have contemporary historical records of them which are proved to be substantially accurate in all their ordinary details, and because we know that Christianity was originally embraced principally on the ground of its Miracles, and that its first converts proved their conviction of its truth by their sufferings and death. We know too that they had gained this conviction in opposition to their prejudices, passions, and worldly interests, after having had the strongest possible motives to examine for themselves, and the most ample and varied means of examination. We cannot therefore reject these records of Miracles without being prepared to reject all historical testimony whatever.

Hence the great majority of historical critics in these modern times *do* accept our Gospels as true records, and of course receive the record of Miracles along with the rest. Some of them, however, interpret this record of Miracles in such a way as to get rid of the Miracle itself. This has been attempted in three separate ways.

(a.) By the eminent German theologian, Professor Paulus of Heidelberg, who attempted to explain every narrative of miracle as the narrative of an ordinary event. For instance, when Jesus is said, in Matthew viii. 2—4, to have cleansed the leper — ("full of leprosy," according to Luke v. 12,)—Paulus contends that Jesus merely declared that his leprosy was not contagious, and that he would soon be well and pronounced clean by the priest; that when Jesus professed his willingness to cleanse the man of his leprosy, he meant no more than that he would freely explain to him the precise nature of his disorder; and that touching him immediately after, and finding that the

disorder had left him, he pronounced him already clean. So when, in the same chapter, 23—27, Jesus is recorded to have stilled the storm on the Lake, all that really took place was that Jesus, who was familiar with these sudden atmospheric changes of which his disciples were ignorant—(though two of them were fishermen of Bethsaida on the Lake itself while Jesus was a carpenter of Nazareth)—simply affirmed what he knew would immediately happen, and which did happen accordingly. It is surely needless to point out in detail the unwarrantable assumptions involved in both these explanations. The entire system has long been deservedly exploded as one of those "fictions of groundless opinion" which "time blots out."

(b.) A more recent but not more plausible hypothesis by which the reality of the Miracles is set aside, is the mythical hypothesis of Dr. Strauss of Tubingen, who solemnly declares in the preface of his work that the essence of Christianity is entirely independent of his critical remarks. "The supernatural birth of "Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, "remain eternal truths, however their reality as histo- "rical facts may be called in question." Such a statement as this, I confess myself entirely at a loss to understand, and I cannot therefore attempt any argument in reply to it. "The hypothesis of Dr. Strauss is"—(according to the very clear and accurate view presented of it by Dr. Milman, the present Dean of St. Paul's, in his History of Christianity, vol. 1, p. 116.)—"that the whole history of our Lord as related "in the gospels is mythic; that is to say a kind of "imaginative amplification of certain vague and slen- "der traditions, the germ of which it is now impos-

"sible to trace." Dean Milman proceeds to urge objections which appear to him, as they do to me, to be fatal to the whole system.

(c.) Another hypothesis of a somewhat similar character would treat the Miracles as simply figurative representations of spiritual truth. Isaiah writes (xxxv. 5, 6,) of the joyous return from the captivity in Babylon,

> "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
> "And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped:
> "Then shall the lame man leap as a hart,
> "And the tongue of the dumb shall sing:
> "For in the wilderness shall waters break out,
> "And torrents in the desert."

St. Luke records (vii. 19—23), that when the messengers of John the Baptist inquired of Jesus whether he were the expected Messiah or not, Jesus, "in that "same hour, cured many of their infirmities and "plagues and of evil spirits; and unto many that were "blind he gave sight;" and proceeds, "Then Jesus "answering said unto them, Go your way and tell "John what things ye have seen and heard: how that "the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, "the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the "gospel is preached."—Observe the similarity, nay even the identity, say the advocates of this hypothesis. Observe the wide difference, nay even contrast, say I. The one is poetry, the other is history: the one is a bright visionary anticipation of the future, the other is a simple matter-of-fact declaration of the present, adduced in proof of a claim to special office and authority. To identify such things is to renounce judgment and discrimination altogether, and to make the

plainest facts give way before a dogmatic assumption which is as much at variance (as shown in my first Lecture) with sound religious philosophy as it is with genuine history.

The fact, therefore, remains altogether unassailable that Christianity was introduced and established by Miracle *in an historical age*, and still rests on this its original basis as "the power of God unto salvation." To God therefore be the glory, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

LECTURE IV.

DIFFICULTIES AND OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

HAVING briefly noticed various kinds of evidence all concurring to prove that Christianity was introduced into the world and established by Miracle in an historical age, that the records of Christianity are therefore susceptible of confirmation from history and actually have such confirmation in relation to all their ordinary details, while the extraordinary details of miracles, constituting their very texture, are inseparable from these ordinary details,—having further shown how, under the influence of these special divine attestations, the Gospel spread throughout the Roman empire with great rapidity, and how its records were multiplied and diffused in extent far beyond that of any other writings of the same age, the reality of the facts narrated in the gospels, and especially of those which we cannot but interpret as Miracles, is fully and firmly established. Whatever speculative difficulties, therefore, may still remain in connection with these firmly-established facts, they cannot rea-

sonably or justly set aside the testimonies to the facts themselves.

These facts, let it be carefully observed, are not attested as Miracles but simply as facts, and as facts which were abundantly susceptible of clear and accurate observation and record. "It is commonly thought "(says the writer of the article on the Origin of the "Gospels already referred to) that on account of the "miracles which occupy so large a space in the life of "Jesus, it required persons of very peculiar qualifica- "tions to record them. But it does not appear to be "understood that miracles, in the popular acceptation "of the word, do not and cannot depend on human tes- "timony. A man cannot testify to a miracle; he can "testify to a fact. He can report the impressions "made upon his senses: he can tell what he has seen "and heard. Whether the fact he reports be miracu- "lous is another question, for the solution of which "he furnishes only a portion of the materials and "which is to be decided by quite other considerations. "A fact is a matter of testimony, a miracle a matter "of opinion." Hence we sometimes find an attestation to fact which we cannot but deem miraculous by those who either did not discern or would not acknowledge its miraculous character. Does the absence of such discernment or acknowledgment invalidate their testimony to the fact itself? On the contrary, it strengthens that testimony. Thus when (John ix.) the neighbours of the man born blind and those who had been accustomed to see him as a beggar during his blindness took him to the Pharisees, and the man described to the Pharisees, as he had previously done to his conductors, how he had received his sight, and when, after repeated examination, they could not

shake his testimony to the fact that Jesus had opened his eyes on the Sabbath-day but on the contrary completely established that fact, they would not accept it as a proof that Jesus was from God because, as they alleged, "he keepeth not the Sabbath day." Is their testimony to the fact weakened by their obstinate determination to reject the only just inference from it? On the contrary, their testimony to the fact is strengthened by this very rejection, and sealed by their subsequent excommunication of the man himself to whom Jesus had given sight, not on the ground of their having detected any falsehood in his testimony, but on the very ground that he had had the courage to maintain in their presence the only just inference from the fact which he attested.

Whatever speculative difficulties therefore may still remain on the subject of miracles, we cannot reasonably or justly set aside these testimonies to the facts which we necessarily interpret as miraculous. Every subject of observation and inquiry is surrounded by difficulties, and the merest novice in science and philosophy may ask a thousand questions which not the wisest man can possibly answer. At the time when Galileo first discovered and established the truth that the earth moves round the sun, and not the sun round the earth as had previously been the universal belief, that truth encountered many difficulties of the most formidable kind which it was impossible for ages afterwards to solve. The truth itself was however maintained on its own evidence, and many of these formidable difficulties have since altogether disappeared, while the truth itself has become confirmed beyond all question by a vast amount of new and corroborative evidence. So the fact that miracles were wrought by

Christ and his Apostles must stand on its own evidence, whether we can satisfactorily solve every difficulty and remove every objection which human ingenuity can raise or not. Nevertheless it is wise not to shrink from encountering difficulties and objections, provided only we bear in mind that positive and conclusive evidence cannot be legitimately set aside by them; because the difficulty of disposing of this positive and conclusive evidence would then stand in our way as far greater than any difficulty which our limited and imperfect collateral knowledge or ignorance can occasion.

With this proviso, I shall endeavour to set forth briefly and clearly a few difficulties and objections which thoughtful inquirers have felt and suggested in regard to the gospels and especially to the miracles recorded in them. These difficulties and objections may be all arranged under four principal heads: 1. The absence of frequent and detailed notices of the wonderful events recorded in our gospels from the writings of historians and others of the same age outside of the Christian denomination: 2. The long interval which is alleged to have elapsed between the termination of Christ's personal ministry on earth and the earliest known appearance of any one of the gospels: 3. The time when these miraculous attestations to Christianity ceased: and 4. The alleged failure of them to accomplish the object for which it is assumed that they were afforded.

(1.) The absence of frequent and detailed notices of the wonderful events recorded in our gospels from the writings of historians and others of that age outside of the Christian denomination. "It is thought "to be quite irreconcileable with the truth of the

" histories of Christ, that no notice of events so extra-
" ordinary appears in contemporaneous Pagan writers.
" It is curious to observe how they who repeat this
" old objection, look far away to a distance outside of
" the Christian body for the impression which they
" insist the life of Jesus should have made there if it
" were true, and overlook the impression which it
" made nearer home, and which, when duly allowed
" for, throws so much light, as we shall presently see,
" upon the origin and peculiar character of our Chris-
" tian records. But even putting out of view the
" great gulf of contempt which separated the Jews
" from all other nations, and which was so deep and
" strong that even Tacitus, who may be supposed to
" have been as free from vulgar prejudices as any one
" living near that time, regarded Christianity as a
" hateful Jewish superstition,—making no allowance
" for the prejudices which would keep the Greek and
" Roman *literati* from concerning themselves about
" events that passed in Judæa,—it is abundantly
" sufficient to account for their silence to consider
" that no events, however extraordinary, have power
" to make any deep or lasting impression on those
" with whose modes of thinking they possess no
" affinity. The most wonderful things may occur:
" but they, or at least the distant reports of them,
" pass like a summer cloud unless they tally with our
" conscious or unconscious philosophy. Through the
" occasional glimpses that we get of Roman gentle-
" men at the time of the New Testament history, we
" can readily imagine with what indifference and con-
" tempt, any rumours of wonderful events coming
" from Judæa would be received in the polished and
" philosophic circles of Greece and Rome. Pilate

" and Gallio represented a class. So long as, and " wherever the life of Christ was an utter anomaly in " the world of thought, it could attract but transient " attention; but as it grew and became an institution, " it attracted notice enough. Indeed it was not then " slow in taking well nigh exclusive possession of the " literature of half the world."*

(2.) The long interval which elapsed between the termination of Christ's personal ministry on earth and the earliest known appearance of any one of the gospels, is not unfrequently alleged as impairing their credibility.

" It is thought by some to be a very serious objec- " tion to the truth of the gospels, that so long a space " of time, twenty years or more, should have elapsed " between the life of Christ and these records of it. " But the force of this objection is broken when it is " considered that, while events so remarkable must " have taken shape in early and fragmentary docu- " ments, these documents would be comparatively slow " in taking the form which they now have, slow in " acquiring the value and authority which they came " to obtain, so long as the minds of the early disciples " were filled with the expectation of the speedy and " glorious reappearance of Christ.

" We at the present day regard the Christian reve- " lation as substantially closing with the final disap- " pearance of Christ, and we naturally wonder that " his disciples were not more careful than they appear " to have been to record every act and word of his for " the information of those who came after them. But " we forget that, to the first disciples, when Jesus

* See *American Christian Examiner*, January, 1861, as before.

" had disappeared, the great dispensation had hardly
" begun. It is true they believed that they had seen
" and heard the glorious Messiah: but it was the Mes-
" siah *incognito*. The great Coming was yet to be.
" They were looking for the visible return of Christ
" and that very shortly, and with demonstrations of
" power which would cast all that they had witnessed,
" remarkable as it was, into the shade. They stood
" with their backs to the Past in an attitude of
" absorbing expectation. The splendour of the near
" Future shone into their hearts, and filled them with
" a faith which did not need to seek strength in the
" Past. In the rapid succession of stirring events
" which they were witnessing, and in which they were
" sharing, there had come no period when they might
" pause to review and record what had been. They
" were too much occupied in making history to think of
" writing it. Of all that had occurred, the death and
" resurrection of Jesus being the crowning facts, alone
" had power to retain a distinct place in their minds.
" But even these great events are no where referred
" to in the Epistles in the shape of a formal narrative,
" unless we except I. Corinthians xv., where some-
" thing in the form of a brief account of the reappear-
" ance of Christ after death is found. A brief account
" of the origin of the Lord's Supper occurs in I. Co-
" rinthians xi. 23—25. Every where else, these two
" prominent facts are alluded to only for the sake of
" signifying the spiritual experiences of the writers
" and their fellow believers: for instance, 'If ye then
" be *risen* with Christ, *crucified* with Christ, &c.,'
" which shows, we think, how the external body, the
" historical form of the details of the life of Jesus was
" fused and melted into their inmost consciousness,

" or buried there like seed out of which the loftiest " hopes were springing. Christ himself was present " with them more intimately than ever, and the idea " of him glowed within them like a live coal. Look- " ing for his visible return in power and great glory " at any moment, and for a revolution of unimagined " grandeur, they had little inclination to dwell upon " the receding past, or if they did revert to it, they " could hardly suppose that there was time left for " preserving the memory of any thing. The night " was far spent; the day, the great day of the Lord " was at hand."

" This expectation goes far to account for the tardy " appearance of the gospels in their present shape. " So long as the first disciples were excited by the " idea that Jesus was shortly to reappear, it is hardly " possible that they should have estimated the events " of his life at the value which they afterwards had, " lying as these events did in the past behind them: " but as time went on and Christ did not appear, and " as moreover the idea of him with its kindred ideas, " its faiths and its hopes, was becoming fixed in their " minds, becoming instituted, in a word becoming a " religion, there was slowly taking place a silent and " unconscious revolution which elevated the past into " importance, and the records of the past grew into a " sacred authority. Thus the gospels assumed the " position which they have now for centuries held. " Had it not been so, had not a religion arisen and " been instituted requiring the past to authenticate it, " the primitive documents out of which grew the " gospels, true and remarkable as they were, might " have disappeared altogether. For the most extra- " ordinary events may occur and prove little more

" than a nine days' wonder, unless they incorporate " themselves with some continued movement or per- " manent institution, unless they enter in and become " connected with some established modes of thought."

This tardy appearance of the gospels in their present shape does not therefore in the smallest degree invalidate their intrinsic credibility. They are evidently made up from very early sketches previously existing: and the form of these early sketches, as it was likely to be the most faithful, so would it be almost sure to be retained; " not at the first because " of any of the superstitious reverence for the letter " which has since so long protected it, but because " the people among whom these primitive documents " circulated were not practised in the arts of composi- " tion, and their unskilled fingers were not likely to " tamper with the letter of these early scriptures. " It was enough if they were able to read them. The " art of writing in those days, especially among those " classes to which the first Christians for the most " part belonged, was neither common nor facile. As " the facts of the life of Jesus were slow in getting " written down," in a continuous history, " so when " once-written they would not be likely to undergo " any changes or alterations but such trivial ones as " were caused accidentally and without intention. " Hence the verbal similarity of the present gospels " composed, as we suppose they are in great part, of " these primitive documents.

" When the gospels first began to circulate in these " incipient forms, there must have been numbers who " were already familiar with their contents and able " to judge concerning their authenticity from having " heard them long and often before from competent

"persons. Accordingly we may understand how it "was that the growth or multiplication of these "writings was limited by their truth. Some few docu- "ments of a fabulous character may have become "incorporated with them, but not many. The pub- "licity and general knowledge of the main facts would "naturally operate as a check upon the indefinite "increase of such documents: and gradually, as the "number of those who had more or less knowledge "of the facts of the history became less—in a word, "as the generation to whom the facts were thus "known was passing away—not only would these "records rise in value, but any new ones that might "appear lacking the voucher of any previous general "acceptance, would be regarded with distrust and "refused admission to the received gospels.*"

(3.) At what period did the age of miracles cease, and why?—Christians universally believe that miracles were wrought by Christ and his Apostles, and almost all Protestant Christians believe that they are not wrought now. There must have been a time therefore when they ceased: what time was that? The question of fact must be answered by an appeal to history; and such an appeal, very lengthy and elaborate, was made more than a century ago by the very learned Dr. Conyers Middleton, author of an equally learned and elaborate biography of Cicero, with which most scholars are familiar. On the subject with which we are now concerned, it will be enough for me to quote the title page of Dr. Middleton's work: "A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers "which are supposed to have subsisted in the Chris-

* See *American Christian Examiner*, January 1861, as before.

" tian Church from the earliest ages through several " successive centuries; by which it is shown that we " have no sufficient reason to believe, upon the " authority of the primitive Fathers, that any such " Powers were continued to the Church after the days " of the Apostles." The body of this work consists of an examination of these primitive Fathers. Their testimonies stand in contrast with the testimonies of the Evangelists, not in harmony with them. To note only a single particular. " In the case of these " miracles"— (writes Dr. Middleton, p. 123, after having gone through all the various kinds of miraculous gifts which are affirmed to have subsisted in the Church during the second and third centuries)— " there is one circumstance common to all the writers " who attest them as well in the earlier as the later " ages, that though their assertions be strong, their " instances are weak: and when in proof of what " they affirm, they descend to allege any particular " facts, they are usually so unlucky in the choice of " them, that instead of strengthening they weaken " the credit of their general affirmation, and from the " absurdity of each miracle related by them, furnish a " fresh objection to their power of working any." Just as the genuine gospels and epistles gave rise during the first four centuries to many fictitious gospels and epistles which were rejected by the general body of Christians though received by some separate churches here and there, and which are in contrast with the genuine books of the New Testament, so the genuine miracles gave rise to fictitious miracles, accepted only here and there, and exhibiting a similar contrast. And there is one contrast which is funda-

mental and conclusive against these later miracles. The miracles of the New Testament were wrought to *introduce* the Christian religion into the world; whereas these later miracles, if wrought at all, were wrought when it had been introduced and accepted at least to the extent which has proved sufficient to hand it down to the present day.

And here we have the full and sufficient reason why miracles have ceased. *They have done their work.* That work was to plant and root Christianity in the world. For this purpose they were absolutely necessary. It is not unfrequently asserted that the moral and spiritual excellence of the principles and precepts of the Gospel is their all-sufficient recommendation, the self-contained attestation of their divine origin and authority which renders all further attestation unnecessary. This no doubt is true in relation to minds already enlightened and cultivated under the influence, conscious or unconscious, of the Christian dispensation; but to no extent is it true in relation to minds clouded by superstition and prejudice, and corrupted by evil inclinations and habits. From formal and hypocritical ceremonialists, such as were the countrymen and contemporaries of Jesus of Nazareth, he would never have obtained even a hearing without miracles: nor would his apostles ever have obtained a hearing among the degraded slaves of superstition and priestcraft with all their concomitant vices in the heathen world, had not God through Christ continually worked with them and confirmed their word by the signs which followed it. (Mark xvi. 20.) But that necessity has now ceased. Well writes Dr. Temple in his essay on "the Education of

the World:"* "The one Example of all examples "came in the 'fulness of time,' just when the world "was fitted to feel the power of his presence. Had "his revelation been delayed till now, assuredly it "would have been hard for us to recognise his Divi- "nity;"—(by which I understand his divine mis- sion:)—"for the faculty of Faith has turned inwards, "and cannot now accept any outer manifestations of "the truth of God." Such outer manifestations now would be a disturbance of the order which marks God's providence. In our Lord's days, men were ready enough to accept miracles, and to look for them as the natural accompaniments of a divine commission to instruct. In the present day, most educated men would be repelled instead of attracted by a claim to miraculous power, and the working of miracles would probably hinder instead of helping the cause which they were meant to support: since it might be reason- ably required that that cause should depend on its own intrinsic merits, seeing that the education of the world is far enough advanced to enable men to judge of these merits. Once the miracles did much to induce men to accept the doctrine; now the doctrine is what chiefly induces men to accept the miracles by inviting attention to the records in which both are contained. In other words, the very success of Chris- tianity and its spiritual influences in the education of men, has carried us far beyond the need of miracles, far beyond even the wish for them. Am I asked then, If God has spoken to man by miracles in the past, why are we to suppose that He will always be silent as regards this mode of speaking, for the future? I answer, Because the world is already advanced beyond

* Essays and Reviews, 2nd edition; London: Parker & Son, 1860, page 24.

the stage where miracles are needful. Christianity *is* planted and rooted, and committed to our faithful maintenance and improvement.

Hence, then, the miracles of the Gospel have *not* failed. Let us briefly notice, however, their *alleged* failure.

(4.) Consider the *alleged* failure of the miracles to accomplish the object for which it is assumed that they were wrought. That object is assumed to have been the conversion of the Jews, yet confessedly they were not all converted. The reason is obvious. Their preconceived opinions respecting the character of their expected Messiah and the nature of his kingdom, closed the minds and hearts of the majority against the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, while their superstitious belief in witchcraft and sorcery enabled them to evade the force of his miracles when they had determined to reject his claims. Against this superstitious evasion Jesus argues on three grounds: (Matthew xii. 25—29.) 1. The absurdity of the supposition that Satan would labour to destroy his own kingdom by fighting against himself. 2. That their own disciples or followers who practised exorcism, must then be subject to the same condemnation. This argument is equally valid whether the exorcism practised were effectual or fraudulent. 3. The obvious consideration that Satan or Beelzebub could only be cast out by some power greater than his own; that is by the spirit or power of God. Whence the equally obvious inference that the kingdom of God was actually come nigh unto them; that as Jesus performed works of Divine energy, he gave conclusive evidence of a Divine mission. And so Nicodemus professed that he was convinced: (John iii. 2,) "Rabbi, we know that thou art

" a teacher come from God: for no man can do these " miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Here then among the Jews in the time of Christ, we have evidence of the very same reverence on the part of our great Creator for his own Spirit of which he has made us all partakers, as we see and feel at the present day. God never forces conviction; he never works any moral miracles: but " as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be," He

> " ——— binding nature fast in fate
> " Left free the human will."—*Pope.*

In the exercise of this freedom of will, the Jews did not *all* believe, because labouring under that judicial blindness and insensibility which is the providentially appointed penalty of a perverse and disobedient will: according to the word of Isaiah respecting the obstinate unbelievers of his day: Jehovah "hath blinded " their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they " should not see with their eyes, nor understand with " their heart, and be converted, and I should heal " them." (John xii. 40.) On the very same principle our Divine Teacher declares, (John vii. 17,) " If any " man desire to do His will, he shall know respecting " my doctrine whether it be from God, or whether I " speak of myself."

Neither, for the same reason, did Christianity obtain an universal reception among the Gentiles: yet it spread very rapidly and very widely among them, and this by the same evidence of miracles either wrought or attested. Specially the well-attested resurrection of Christ was the great miracle on which the faith of the early Christian church in the gospel of life and immortality mainly rested. " If Christ

" have not been raised, (writes St. Paul to the Corin-
" thians, I. xv. 14, 17, 20,) then is our preaching vain,
" and your faith also is vain: Your faith is vain; ye
" are still in your sins. But in truth Christ hath
" been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them
" that have fallen asleep."

By these means, the Gospel of Christ was not forced upon the reception of men, but was effectually planted and rooted in the world. It has thus descended to our times as the most powerful Providential agency for the improvement of our race. We who are called in the good providence of God to the enjoyment of its light and guidance, are individually responsible for the trust which has been committed to us, are under the most solemn obligations to improve it, and to transmit it unimpaired to those who come after us.

In this view, the institution of the Lord's Supper,* considered simply in its character of a memorial of the death of Christ as the necessary preliminary to his glorious resurrection, has an urgent claim on the reverential regard of all who conscientiously accept it. It attests two indissolubly connected events in the history of our Lord, and both of a miraculous character. His death which we "show forth" occurred under the precise circumstances, which, contrary to all seeming probability, he had clearly predicted: and by his resurrection more strikingly than by any other miracle, God gave assurance unto all men that He had ordained him, and would ultimately judge the world in righteousness by him. (Acts xvii. 31.)

* This Lecture having been delivered on the first Sunday in the month, the Lord's Supper was administered immediately after it, according to the usual custom of our Church.

This chain of testimony commencing with the Apostolic age, it is, I think, our solemn duty, individually and in our several churches, to prolong. The very existence of this sacred rite in our own day considered in connection with the historical records of its origin whose validity we have already fully established, abundantly vindicates the testimony of miracles to the divine mission of Jesus, and proves that this testimony has been, thus far at least, fully effectual, not merely to introduce his Gospel into the world, but permanently to establish it. It clearly devolves upon us and upon all who come after us, each in his own day and generation, in connection with this best gift as well as in connection with all the ordinary gifts of the Divine bounty, to show ourselves "good stewards "of the manifold grace of God." May He mercifully aid us to do so in the spirit and after the example of Christ Jesus, our Lord! Amen.

LECTURE V.

MIRACLES: THEIR RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE, CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO GOD, TO CHRIST, AND TO OURSELVES.

We have considered the question of Miracles philosophically, historically, critically: and we have seen that sound philosophy, authentic history, and enlightened criticism, concur in vindicating the claims of the miracles of the Gospel on our grateful and reverential faith. There is one other relation in which we should regard them; that is in their religious significance as considered in connection with God, with Christ, and with ourselves. It is with a view to this highest relation that I have discussed the previous questions just noticed, in our Church and in our assembly for Worship. The Lecture-room would have been the more appropriate place, especially as affording opportunity for inquiry and discussion on the part of my hearers: but it is one effect of the false religious philosophy which now extensively prevails, that it indisposes men for inquiries which, at the close of the last and beginning of the present century, were thought to deserve serious and earnest prosecution, and which *were* seriously and earnestly prosecuted,

therefore, by our pious forefathers of the Unitarian Christian church, both ministers and people. At present it is the fashion to treat such inquiries as having no practical importance whatever: and what is the result? The gospel of life and truth and freedom is removed, by many even of its professed teachers, out of the region of realities into that of mere fancy and feeling; is classed with the writings of Shakespeare and of other men of distinguished genius, as though no higher inspiration or authority than that of genius were ever possible; and thus every man becomes his own Christ and maintains his own gospel, which is precisely what many teachers and professors of religion in these days actually are and do. They preach themselves, not Christ Jesus the Lord; they serve their hearers, not for Jesus' sake, but for the sake of themselves acquiring a mean popularity, and of promoting merely transient and temporal objects in lieu of such as are really spiritual and eternal. Not that the Christian, whether teacher or taught, ought ever to neglect those transient and temporal objects which the providence of God invites him to accomplish: but no objects of this kind should ever be treated as supreme and ultimate. They should all of them, even the best and noblest, be always prosecuted in habitual recognition of the principle which St. Paul avows, (II. Corinthians iv. 18,) "We look, not at the "things which are seen, but at the things which are "not seen: for the things which are seen are tempo-"ral, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Hence the great importance to us of the Christian miracles as *realities*, not fables, not figures of speech. They are among the things which are "not seen," but which may become, by careful investigation, the legi-

timate objects of a rational, elevating, and lively faith; and when contemplated as realities by such faith, they are clear and sacred attestations to the immediate and special divine origin of Christianity itself, and thus to its distinct and immediate revelation of God and his will, and of our duties and destiny.

That such *is* their exalted and sacred function will be clearly seen if, in endeavouring to estimate their religious significance, we consider them,

(1.) In relation to God and his highest purposes in the government of the universe.

In defining Miracle, we have already seen that its essence consists in its being an *exception* to the ordinary physical modes of the Divine operation which we call the "laws of nature." These ordinary physical modes are, with this exception, uniformly maintained, so that a distinct order and method of Divine operation are clearly seen in the ordinary course of nature. Why are order and method thus steadily maintained? Not for the mere preservation of life; for the Divine energy, which is the sole and unceasing source of all life and power, might be exerted in an infinite variety of modes just as we see it actually manifested in an infinite variety of results. Order, method are maintained in nature, not in the least as necessary to the efficacy therein of the power of God—for he speaks and it is done—but solely with a view to the instruction and improvement of Man and of whatever other beings the great Creator has made partakers of his own intelligence. "Mind"—therefore writes Dr. Channing—"Mind (by which we mean both moral and intellectual "powers,) is God's first end. The great purpose for "which an order of nature is fixed, is plainly the for-

" mation of Mind. In a creation without order, where " events would follow without any regular succession, " it is obvious that Mind must be kept in perpetual " infancy; for in such a universe, there could be no " reasoning from effects to causes, no induction to " establish general truths, no adaptation of means to " ends; that is, no science relating to God, or matter, " or mind; no action; no virtue." But "it is the " mark of a weak mind to make an idol of order and " method; to cling to established forms of business " when they clog instead of advancing it." Such mere official formality is at once designated and denounced in the popular phraseology of the present day as "red-tapeism." Is it consistent with any worthy conceptions of God to assign such mere routine formality to him? to regard his proceedings as in any sense merely *official?* "If, then, the great purposes " of the universe can best be accomplished by depart- " ing from its established laws, these laws will un- " doubtedly be suspended; and though broken in the " letter they will be observed in their spirit; for the " ends for which they were first instituted will be " advanced by their violation."* Do we not consider a fertility of expedients as indicative of intellectual power and skill among men, and shall we presume to limit within the narrow range of our observation and experience, the infinite fertility of expedients which is available to God? If the case, then, should ever occur, in which the interests of Mind can be best promoted by departing from the established order of nature, then miracles become necessary; and if necessary, why should they not be wrought? Is it not by the incessant energy of the ever-present God ever

* The Evidences of Revealed Religion, Dudleian Lecture, 1821.

immanent throughout his whole universe, that the established order of nature is maintained? Why then may not this same energy be at any time manifested in a departure from that order, if the great purpose of the order itself will be thereby promoted? The maintenance of that order and the departure from it are both equally possible with God. Why should he not, then, adopt either the one or the other, according as he sees that either is best suited to accomplish the benevolent purposes of his over-ruling providence? The truth is, as Dr. Channing elsewhere remarks, that "the great repugnance to the belief of miraculous "agency is found in a lurking atheism, which ascribes "supremacy to nature, and which, whilst it professes "to believe in God, questions his tender concern for "the improvement of men. To a man who cherishes "the sense of God, the great difficulty is, not to "account for miracles, but to account for their rare "occurrence. One of the mysteries of the universe "is this, that its Author retires so continually behind "the veil of his works, that the great and good Father "does not manifest himself more distinctly to his "creatures. There is something like coldness and "repulsiveness in instructing us only by fixed, in-"flexible laws of nature. The intercourse of God "with Adam and the patriarchs suits our best concep-"tions of the relation which he bears to the human "race, and ought not to surprise us more than the "expression of a human parent's tenderness and con-"cern towards his offspring."*

Scepticism in regard to miracles as deviations from the ordinary course of nature, involves, moreover, essentially a narrowness of mind, inasmuch as it makes

* Dudleian Lecture, as before.

the present the absolute measure of the past and the future. It takes no account of the manifold stages through which the human race is destined to pass, of the great variety of discipline which the education of the ever-growing mind must require, of the preparation for a far higher order of being which is carrying on here on earth. Strange indeed is it that men of science should fall into this error. They know full well that this globe of ours which seems so unchangeable is very far indeed from being now what it was a few thousand years ago. They should, therefore, learn to free themselves from the vulgar narrowness which can see and imagine nothing in the past but the present, and should learn the stupendous and infinite variety of the dispensations of God.*

Miracles, in fact, solve the very difficulties which mere unbroken order must have raised respecting God and his providence, and which could in no other way be effectually removed. The very conception of the existence of a self-derived, independent, infinite and eternal Being is one which it is exceedingly difficult to realize, as an object of faith, even with every aid which we now possess: and apart from all express revelation, it would, I think, be impossible to realize it. For as regards the usual order of nature and providence, it has been well asked by thoughtful and reverential minds unable to raise themselves to the height of this glorious conception, Do we know any thing but phenomena? And if all these phenomena be but parts of an eternal unchanging series conducted with mechanical regularity, how little do they encourage us to look any farther or higher than themselves! But let the series be at any time interrupted, let the

* See Channing, *Evidences of Christianity*, Part II.

mechanical order be visibly and palpably broken, especially through the agency of one who claims on that very ground to be received as a messenger from God, and proves by the vast number and variety of his wonderful works that God is in very deed with him, and hath in very deed sent him, and we then have a distinct and irrefragable assurance afforded us by God himself, not only that he is but that he careth for us, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. The essential distinction which obtains between the doubtful and merely conjectural theology of the heathen philosophy, and the clear and decisive theology of the Jewish and Christian religions and of others historically derived from them, is mainly due to this fact of direct revelation attested by miracles belonging exclusively to the latter.

(2.) Let us consider the miracles of the Gospel in relation to Christ. They were clearly his *credentials*, to which he himself and his Apostles after him continually appealed as proving that he came from God. "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, "the same works that I do, bear witness of me that "the Father hath sent me." (John v. 36.) "If I do "not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if "I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; "that ye may know and believe that the Father is in "me, and I in him." (John x. 37, 38.) In like manner the apostle Peter declares before his countrymen in Jerusalem, "Jesus of Nazareth, proved unto you "to be a man from God by miracles and wonders and "signs which God did through him in the midst of "you as ye yourselves also know." These were the credentials, then, which proved that Jesus was *from* God and consequently was not himself God: and

these credentials are manifestly in harmony with the office to which he laid claim. He was "the Christ" of God, not as having been literally "anointed," for it was at his baptism that he was announced as the "beloved Son" of God, not at any ceremony of anointing: but he was "the Christ"—that is "the Anointed"—as having been set apart to the high office on which he then entered, as kings and priests were set apart by the ceremony of *anointing* under the first dispensation. That he *was* thus set apart, his miracles abundantly testified: they were the appropriate credentials of his special divine mission and authority, itself special and miraculous as were these credentials by which it was attested. They who deny the miracles must, in all consistency, reject the Christ; for the office is just as special as its credentials.

Nor less are the miracles of Christ in harmony with the character of his Gospel as an express and immediate revelation from God. You cannot find the origin of Christianity in either heathenism or Judaism: it stands in direct antagonism to both. There was nothing in the existing opinions of men or in the state of society in which Christianity appeared which can at all account for its origin and diffusion. It sprang up in opposition to prevailing sentiments and habits, making no compromise with the prejudices or passions which it every where encountered; and it sprang up, not only superior to all existing systems of religion, but possessing *at its very beginning* a perfection which has been the admiration of ages, and which instead of being dimmed by time, has come forth more brightly and more beneficently with every advance which the human mind has made in know-

ledge and in goodness. Thus Christianity did not *grow*. "The conception which filled the mind of Jesus" (continues Dr. Channing, after having noticed this as one of the great distinctions of the gospel)— "The conception which filled the mind of Jesus of a "religion more spiritual, generous, comprehensive "and unworldly than Judaism and destined to take "its place, was not of gradual formation. We detect "no signs of it and no efforts to realize it before "his time: nor is there an appearance of its being "gradually matured by Jesus himself. Christianity "was delivered from the first in its full proportions, "in a style of singular freedom and boldness, and "without a mark of painful elaboration. This sud- "denness with which this religion broke forth, this "maturity of the system at the very moment of its "birth, this absence of gradual development, seems to "me a strong mark of its divine original."*

Hence, therefore, the *authority* with which Jesus spake, and which was acknowledged on account of his so clearly vindicating by his miracles his claim to that authority. Had the doctrines which he taught originated simply with his own unaided intellect, such a claim would have been the height of insolent presumption; and his character, thus palpably vitiated by fanaticism or fraud, would deserve our severest reprehension, and his self-assumed authority, our indignant rejection and resistance. Well might the celebrated author of "Phases of Faith" express his suspicion that he might think the character of Fletcher of Madeley a more perfect one than that of Jesus of Nazareth, if the latter, professing to be the Christ of God, adduced no adequate evidence to substantiate his claims, but

* Channing, *Evidences of Christianity*, Part II.

trusted to the unblushing effrontery of insolent self-assertion to maintain the imposture which itself had originated. I profess myself altogether unable even to *conceive* how any one who repudiates the miracles of Jesus can vindicate his character, or in consistency with the maintenance of his own spiritual freedom, can look up to him with reverence as Teacher and Lord.

Hence, again, the endless *development* of which Christianity itself, as embodied in the life and teachings of its great Founder, is susceptible; just like the endless development of God's power and providence in the structure and government of His material universe as manifested through the ever-extending discoveries of physical science. The lilies of the field, expanding their brilliant blossoms and filling the air with fragrance, were cited by our divine Teacher as familiar illustrations of the providential care of God, who thus clothes them with a beauty and splendour eclipsing all the pomp of kings: and the illustration was conclusive in its connection with our Saviour's argument, though it involved no more regard to their structure and functions than was presented to the most superficial observation. How greatly have the researches of modern science into the physiology of the vegetable creation tended to the further development of this same providential care, and the further confirmation of the same sublime argument. Just so, as the education of the race of man advances under the providence of God, the wonders of his holy Gospel will become continually more and more developed for our admiration and gratitude, as we find them unfolding with our ever-increasing capacity for the discovery and reception of religious truth, and thus ever afford-

ing us an increasing testimony to the divine origin of the Gospel itself, and the divine mission and authority of the great Teacher who was specially *anointed* to proclaim it.

Already we behold manifestations of this development. At the time when the Gospel was first proclaimed, slavery was an universal institution, and "the right divine of kings to govern wrong," generally passed unquestioned, even until the sixteenth century of the Christian era. It is now clearly seen by the vast majority of the Christian world that neither of these social assumptions is consistent with the Divine Will as revealed in the principles and spirit of the Gospel of Christ. And there are yet *very* many other similar lessons still to be learned, nor least in this Christian England of ours, and by those too who are specially set apart as the expositors of this very Gospel. I doubt not that in the lapse of another century or two, these additional manifestations of development to which I immediately refer, will have become as clear and as generally accepted as are those already mentioned.

Hence, once more, the perfection of Christ's own character: a perfection which he attained by his faithful improvement of unprecedented talents, endurance of unprecedented trials, and accomplishment of an unprecedented work. Though he was in the very "form of God," being filled with all the fulness of God to the utmost extent of human capacity, and so appearing amongst men as in a special and exalted sense, *the* Son of God, yet he regarded not this, his resemblance to God as a private or personal possession, but so far as affected his own individual advantage as a sojourner on earth, he emptied himself of it,

and took upon him the form of a servant, being himself to all outward appearance no other than any ordinary man. Nay, further, in the fulfilment of the great purposes of his Heavenly Father's love, he humbled himself, and voluntarily submitted himself to death, even the ignominious and agonizing death of the cross. "Wherefore God also hath highly "exalted him, and given him a name which is above "every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee "should bow,—and every tongue confess *him* Lord, "to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians ii. 9—11.) While thus renouncing all personal and selfish advantage from his wondrous gifts, he reverently devoted them to the work which his Father had given him to do. "His miracles," (therefore, justly writes Miall,) "are uniformly as modest as "they are decisive; evince a fellow-feeling with the "wretched as strikingly as they do a perfect com-"mand of divine power; and address themselves as "pointedly to our sensibilities as they do to our "reason." Witness his reply to the messengers of John the Baptist when they desired assurance of his authority. Having, "in the same hour, cured many "of their infirmities and diseases and of evil spirits," and given sight to many blind, he answered them, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have "seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame "walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the "dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended "in me." (Luke vii. 21—23.) Thus scrupulously restricting his special divine powers to the special work of his mission, and being ever diligent and faithful in applying them to that work, he has become,

for men of every age and condition in life, a pattern of faith and obedience which it is at once our privilege and duty to endeavour to imitate, but which it is impossible that we should ever excel. For men of every age and nation, in every stage of advancement in civilization, virtue and piety, he is and will for ever continue to be the Christ, the holy one of God; reigning as our spiritual Teacher and Lord until God have put all enemies under his feet; and then, but not till then, resigning into his Father's hands his mediatorial trust; "that God may be all in all." (I. Corinthians, xv. 25, 28.)

(8.) Let us consider the miracles of the Gospel in relation to ourselves. We have already seen how the very perfections of the infinite and invisible God must ever render the belief of his existence and providence difficult to the unaided intellect of man. In every age there have been thoughtful and reverential persons who have feared to trust to any thing as an element of positive knowledge except the phenomena which are the objects of sense and sight; and it may be reasonably questioned whether the distinction which is now all but universally recognised between the *entity or reality*, and the *phenomenon or appearance*, would ever have been established by mere abstract philosophy unaided by the influence, whether conscious or unconscious, of revealed truth. Such is indeed the natural imperfection of our powers and limitation of the range of our observation, that there is scarce any matter of inquiry in regard to which we do not need a *concurrence* of testimony in order to enable us to feel reasonably confident that we have discovered the truth. Thus argues our Lord himself with his countrymen in connection with the very subject which we

are now considering. "It is also written in your law "that the testimony of two men is true. I am one "that bear witness of myself, and the Father that "sent me beareth witness of me." (John viii. 17, 18.) This "Evidence of Congruity," as it has been well designated by the intelligent and discriminating author of "The Restoration of Belief," from which I quoted largely in Lecture III. (p. 44.) This "Evidence of Congruity" is indispensable, as I believe, in every investigation, to the firm and conclusive establishment of truth. Without it, we have not advanced beyond rational hypothesis, nor can do so; and a mere hypothesis, however rational, may ultimately prove erroneous. Thus Miracles are, as I judge, *absolutely necessary* to establish conviction of the Divine perfections and providence, because they afford this evidence of congruity; apart from which I exceedingly doubt (as a matter of philosophy not less than as a matter of fact) whether such conviction can be *established* at all. But when I speak of *establishing* conviction, I desire specially to guard myself from being thought to intimate that they in any degree *force* it. Their agency is as strictly and purely rational as that of any other evidence which the mind can contemplate. How could Nicodemus, as a reasonable and honest man, have resisted the conclusion at which he avowed that he had arrived by his own observation of the miracles of Jesus? "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher "come from God: for no man can do these miracles "that thou doest, except God be with him." (John iii. 2.) There is no force in this case but the legitimate force of congruity of evidence: that very force which we need to establish rational conviction, just as we need the vital energy which our great Creator

continually supplies to maintain the consciousness and activity of our bodily life.

Nothing, indeed, strikes me more than the reverence which our great Creator ever manifests in his dealings with us for that spirit of his own of which he has graciously made us partakers, and by partaking of which, we are not merely his creatures but his children. Would that men would endeavour to become like God in this respect, and reverence his free spirit in each other! Were this done, intelligent and serious inquiry, and the honest avowal of its results, would never then have to encounter, as they too often have to encounter among us even in these days, the reproaches of the arrogant and presumptuous, who forget that they are just as fallible as the brother whom they summarily condemn. Neither, again, would men dare to have recourse to either bribes or threats with a view of influencing thereby the course of free and honest inquiry: they would shrink from all such agencies as profane, as doing despite to the very spirit of God himself. Nothing like this violence is observable in Christianity or in the special evidence of its divine origin and authority which its miracles afford.

Well, therefore, writes Dr. Channing of the adaptation of Christianity to the soul of man. "When I "look into the soul, I am at once struck with its "immeasurable superiority to the body. How con- "sistent is Christianity with this inward teaching! "What contempt does Jesus cast on the body and its "interests when compared with the redemption of the "soul! Another great truth dawns on me when I "look within. I learn more and more that the great "springs of happiness and misery are in the mind:

"and Christianity is not only consistent with, but "founded on this great truth, teaching us that the "kingdom of heaven is within us. Again, I discern "in the soul capacities which are not fully unfolded "here: and how does Christianity agree with this "teaching of our own souls? Its great doctrine is "that of a higher life, where the spiritual germ within "us will open for ever, and where the immortal good "after which the mind aspires will prove a reality. I "say, then, Christianity consists with the nature "within us as well as with the nature around us. "The highest truths in respect to the soul are not "only responded to, but are carried out by Chris-"tianity, so that it deserves to be called the perfection "of reason."*

Seeing that this is so, may we not well ask concerning the Carpenter of Nazareth what his fellow-citizens were constrained to ask concerning him when he taught them in their Synagogue, "Whence hath this "man this wisdom and these mighty works?" (Matt. xiii. 54.) Nor can we plead in palliation of our rejection of him and his claims the difficulty which they felt from the circumstance of their familiar acquaintance with himself and his family, and which our Saviour benevolently suggests as the occasion of their being "offended in him," when he affirms, "A prophet "is not without honour save in his own country and "in his own house:" wherefore adds the Apostle who records the incident, "And he did not many mighty "works there because of their unbelief:" proving thereby that these "mighty works" were primarily the credentials of his divine mission, and that he refrained from putting forth these credentials when

* *Christianity a Rational Religion.*

he saw that the force of passion and prejudice was such as to preclude even the possibility of a candid attention and fair appreciation. For it is not under the influence of a foregone conclusion, not in the spirit of a conceited self-sufficiency which presumes to dictate to God the course of his providence instead of reverentially watching and searching out the same, that the record of the miracles of Christ is to be investigated in our own days, any more than the miracles themselves were to be investigated in the days when Christ actually wrought them. We are to come as reverential inquirers to the oracles of God. Both the original miracles and the authentic records of them are adapted to exercise our faith, to deepen our reverence, to preserve us from credulity and superstition, to which (it is worthy of remark) very many of those persons who reject the miracles of Christ are notably victims; not keeping in view as they ought, that a miracle is not a mere marvel, an unmeaning, unintelligible prodigy, but a clear credential from God to the Teacher whom he has sent.

Truly therefore writes Addison on the Christian religion: "A few persons of an odious and despised "country could not have filled the world with be- "lievers had they not shown undoubted credentials "from the Divine Person who sent them on such a "message." These credentials, supplied immediately by God himself, are inwrought into the very texture of the plan and record of God's providential government for all ages as a testimony to them, just as they were themselves a testimony to the age in which they were actually exhibited. The very difficulty which they present at first to our accustomed modes of thought and feeling is in reality a measure of the

demand which they make upon us, with every advance of secular knowledge and civilization, for a proportionate devotion of our time and attention to the evidences of Divine Revelation. As the book which contains the well authenticated record of this revelation, the Bible is of inestimable value to us all; it is the glorious charter of our immortality. The silly sneer in which some have ventured to indulge against Christianity as a "book revelation," needs only to be distinctly uttered in order to meet the contempt which it merits; for what supposition could be more unreasonable and even absurd than that God has specially revealed his will to men, and that the men who accepted the revelation as designed not merely for themselves but for their successors, should yet have taken no pains whatever to record its doctrines and evidences. The Bible contains this *record* of the revelation, not the revelation itself. That was made through Christ and his Apostles. There is surely nothing to provoke a sneer in the allegation that the record of it is in a book. What more clear, intelligible and enduring record of it could human wisdom have devised?

Thus the Bible contains the record of divine revelation, the golden charter of our immortality; and containing this record, how important is the Bible itself and the revelation which it records to our faith in those great facts of our duty and destiny which are therein specially set forth: to our faith, that is, in a resurrection to judgment, and in the necessity of our making diligent preparation, by a truly Christian life on earth, for that judgment. Nor will any man who has this faith hesitate for a moment to feel and acknowledge the inestimable value of that *authority*

which these truths derive from the clear manifestation of a divine power in connection with them, but will humbly and gratefully accept it as a very necessary, and by no means superfluous, *motive* to moral and spiritual culture. "I deem it unnecessary to prove," (writes Paley at the beginning of his treatise on the Evidences of Christianity,) "that mankind stood in "need of a revelation, because I have met with no "serious person who thinks that even under the "Christian revelation we have too much light or any "degree of assurance which is superfluous."

Though not absolutely required by the subject which has been discussed in these Lectures, I cannot conclude them without inviting attention to a circumstance which seems to me to have very important relations to the spiritual and eternal truth which it was the very purpose of Christ's mission and ministry to teach, and of his miracles to confirm: the circumstance, namely, that he who taught this truth and wrought these miracles in evidence of his authority to teach it, was simply and solely what he is designated by his Apostle Peter in the declaration which has been adopted throughout as the text of these Lectures—"a man from God." This, his miracles distinctly proved to those who witnessed them, and prove no less distinctly to us who receive the recorded testimony of those who witnessed them. For that very reason, therefore, they as distinctly prove that Jesus of Nazareth was not God himself, nor in any other sense even an angel of God than as being (what the word *angel* literally means) God's *messenger:* but simply as he himself declares, "a man that hath told "us the truth which he had heard from God." (John viii. 40.) Yet though simply a man in his

nature, as a consequence of which he was subject to all the ordinary trials of our common humanity, (Hebrews iv. 15,) he was by official appointment and endowment, the Christ, the Son of God, the Judge and Saviour of the world, our divinely commissioned Teacher and Lord. For the very reason, therefore, that as Unitarian Christians we are constrained to renounce his *deity* and to repudiate the *worship* of him as God, it behoves us to be specially careful to recognise the *divine authority* with which he was invested by his and our God and Father, to guard the special evidences by which he vindicated his claim to that authority, and to *honour* him as the Christ, the Son of God, even as we *honour* the Father who sent him. (John v. 23.) Let no vain speculations, however ingenious, ever induce us to turn away our attention from the well authenticated records of fact in connection with the providence or the works of God; and then shall we, with full conviction of faith, bow our knees at the throne of the Divine grace in the name of Jesus, reverently and gratefully confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians ii. 10, 11.) May God grant it, for his infinite mercy's sake in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

SUMMARY REVIEW.

(1.) We have seen that a Miracle is a Divine Credential to a Teacher as immediately from God:—no mere marvel or prodigy or novelty of Divine power.

(2.) We have seen that the Gospels which contain the record of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, have the record of his Miracles so interwoven with that of his teachings as to constitute one and the same indivisible texture—so that the doctrine cannot be separated from the miracles: and also that these Miracles were so various in themselves and in the circumstances under which they were wrought, yet so uniformly efficient for their contemplated results, that all supposition of artifice or fraud is entirely precluded.

(3.) We have seen that the record of both the teachings and miracles of Jesus Christ is a record of events by which Christianity was introduced and established in the world in direct opposition to the principles, expectations, and habits which then universally prevailed, not in legendary but *in historical times;* and has within itself innumerable congruities, designed and undesigned, with its own several parts, and with other authentic historical records. The legendary marvels of ages and nations that had no literature, cannot, therefore, be reasonably brought

into comparison with the Gospel miracles—nor on the other hand the miracles alleged to have been wrought in confirmation of the authority of any faith already established. Both these conditions are in contrast, not in harmony, with the conditions of the miracles recorded in our Gospels. We have further seen that the record of Miracles in our Gospels cannot be explained as an exaggerated narrative of ordinary events, or as a myth or fable, or as simply a figurative representation of spiritual truth: neither of these assumptions being at all consistent with the occasions or the results of the Miracles as exhibited in the same record.

(4.) We have seen that for the very reason that the Miracles recorded in the Gospels *did* effect the introduction and establishment of Christianity in the world, they fully accomplished the one only purpose for which they were wrought, and that therefore no such special interpositions are to be expected now.

(5.) We have seen that such direct and striking manifestations of the Divine providence and will might be reasonably expected from our Father in heaven to give us assurance of his love; that they are necessary to the vindication of the character of Christ; and, finally, necessary to our own faith in spiritual and eternal realities.

To deny, therefore, that the Miracles recorded in the Gospels have ever been wrought, is to repudiate the divine mission and authority of Jesus as the Christ; to repudiate his revelation of the God "whom no man hath seen or can see;" to repudiate the concurrent testimony of history and civilization to the Gospel as "the great power of God," commencing its manifestation in the world some eighteen centuries

ago; and to repudiate the *sure and certain* hope of life everlasting. It signifies not at all what were the actual teachings of Jesus considered by themselves. If they stand on no higher level than those of the heathen philosophers, we are still in the darkness of heathenism; and in the same sense in which it was truly written of the Gentiles of old, are "strangers "from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and "without God in the world." (Ephesians ii. 12.) So far are the Miracles of the Gospel, therefore, from being fables or metaphors, that they are the very *testimony* which God has given to the mission of his Son, and which all consistent disciples of his Son *must*, in my judgment, receive. But, "let every man be fully "persuaded in his own mind. To his own master he "standeth or falleth. Let us not, therefore, judge "one another, any more; but judge this rather, that "no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall "in his brother's way." (Romans xiv. 5, 4, 13.)

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THE Worship of this Church is conducted, as regards its GREAT OBJECT, in strict accordance with the distinctive principle of Unitarian Christianity as set forth in the following words of Jesus Christ himself and of the Apostle Paul:—

> "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."
>
> *The "Son" of God in prayer to his "Father."* John xvii. 1. 3.
>
> "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." I. Timothy ii. 5.

And, as regards its SPIRIT, in equal accordance with that principle of Christian Brotherhood which is set forth in the following words of the same sacred Teachers:—

> "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John xiii. 35.
>
> "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Ephesians vi. 24.